

SECRETARY

HALLOFFAME

For more than four decades, **Joan Malkemes** has been working closely with the board of supervisors in Wright Township, Luzerne County, to improve the community. From commercial development to recreation projects, she has provided the grease that keeps the well-oiled machinery of progress chugging along.

The 'enabler'

Joan Malkemes

Wright Township, Luzerne County

45 years of service

BY BRENDA WILT / ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Shortly after Joan Malkemes moved to Wright Township in Luzerne County 46 years ago, the township secretary, who was leaving the area, encouraged her to apply for the position.

It was a part-time job then, which was perfect for Malkemes, who had two young children. Little did she know that it would morph into a full-time gig and that more than four decades later, she would still be doing it.

"When I started, the office was in my house," she recalls. "I had a desk, an IBM Selectric typewriter, one filing cabinet, and a minute book. That was about it."

Malkemes ran the office out of her house for about four years until a municipal building was finished.

That's not the only change she has seen during her township career.

"We had two or three part-time police officers and a part-time road department," she says. "Now we have seven full-time officers and a secretary for the



Joan Malkemes, the long-time secretary for Wright Township in Luzerne County, has been working behind the scenes for more than four decades to keep the township running smoothly.

police department, four full-time road workers, a part-time zoning officer, and a part-time assistant secretary."

In addition, the township has a volunteer fire department that also provides service to neighboring Rice Township and a very active citizenry,

Malkemes says. The supervisors have no problem finding volunteers for the planning commission, zoning hearing board, recreation board, and environmental advisory council.

Working behind the scenes

Not one to toot her own horn, Malkemes describes herself as an "enabler behind the scenes," and Chairman Donald Zampetti is quick to agree.

"For the 20-plus years that I've been working with her, I've found her to be very knowledgeable, up to date on everything, and willing to tackle anything we ask of her," he says. "She's very cooperative and has everything prepared for us and ready to go."

The long-time secretary enjoys talking about the board's accomplishments, many of which involve working with other municipalities and entities. For example, the township worked with the local school district and the county to create keystone opportunity zones in the Crestwood Industrial Park to encourage business growth.

The township also formed the Mountaintop Area Council of Governments with Fairview Township and subsequently added Dorrance Township. The COG operates a joint yard waste composting site in the industrial park, which provides mulch to residents for a nominal fee.

Malkemes is involved with Wright Recreation and Environmental, Inc., a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that the township created about 10 years ago to benefit

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park and environmental projects. It solicits support from area businesses and municipalities to present a fireworks display each year on July 3.

She also touts the township’s park, which features kiddie rides, a zero-grade fountain, also known as a splash pad, an ice skating rink, two tennis courts, a basketball court, a sand volleyball court, and a perimeter walking trail.

Working with people

If there is anything that Malkemes would change about her job, it’s the amount of paperwork.

“Now that we have computers, we’re supposed to have less paperwork, but that’s a fallacy,” she says. “It seems like every time they pass a new law, it creates more paperwork. The legislators aren’t in the trenches and don’t realize that they make it more difficult for us.”

Nevertheless, Malkemes says she loves her job and looks forward to coming to work each day.

“I have a nice board to work with, and the township has been blessed with many good supervisors over the years,” she says.

“Having been here for 45 years, you would think that there would have been one or two who would have gotten mad at Joan, but that’s never happened,” Zampetti says. “She is very good at talking to all kinds of people.”

That’s a key to success as a township secretary, Malkemes believes.

“You have to be able to work with people,” she says. “You also need to be able to read and comprehend because everything you have to do is written somewhere.”

Despite doing this job for 45 years, the widowed mother of two and grandmother of six grandsons isn’t quite ready to hang up her hat. Although she says she’s taking it one year at a time, her words sound like someone who still looks forward to serving her community.

“It’s been challenging and educational,” she says, “and I like working with the people here.” ♦

ARE YOU A LONGTIME TOWNSHIP SECRETARY?

Show us your smile!



Township secretaries who have been serving for at least 20 years are encouraged to visit the Hall of Fame photo booth at PSATS’ 92nd Annual Educational Conference in April at the Hershey Lodge. Photos will be taken **Tuesday, April 15, from 3 to 4 p.m., and Wednesday, April 16, from 7:45 to 8:15 a.m.** in the Chocolate Lobby. If you’ve never had your photo taken for the Hall of Fame, stop by and let us add you to the list for a possible article in a future issue of the *Township News*.

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