

‘Not a one-man show’

E. Kent High

North Coventry Township,

Chester County

48 years of service

BY JENNIFER L. FLORER / ASSISTANT EDITOR

Forty-eight years ago, Republican committee-woman Hazel Rutter urged Kent High to run for a seat on the board of supervisors in North Coventry Township, Chester County. This life-long farmer wanted none of it.

“I wasn’t interested at all, but she talked me into it,” High remembers. He had no inkling of how that conversation would impact his future.

Almost five decades later, High can look back on a lifetime of public service dedicated to preserving open space and planning for business and residential growth. The township of just under 14 square miles was home to about 4,400 residents when High first took office. Today, that number is close to 7,900. Clearly, the growing population liked the leadership they got from this native son.

“I was interested in open space because I was born and raised here in the township,” High says. “I was never heavy on the spending, and I guess that’s another reason everyone kept voting me into office.”

Fellow North Coventry Township supervisor Spencer Claypoole says those are just two of many reasons.

“He’s allowed for economic growth in the township through increased business, but at the same time, he’s also helped to preserve the rural aspects without allowing businesses to crowd where people live and how they live,” Claypoole says. “Had he not been in this position, I’m not sure someone else would have been as sensitive to maintaining the rural aspects of the community.”

Township manager Kevin Hennessey echoes those sentiments.

“He’s been a steadying factor for the township over his whole career,” Hennessey says. “Growing up on a farm and being a farmer, he’s practical and fiscally

conservative while at the same time looking out for the growth of the township and progress where and when it's needed.”

Residents enjoy modern conveniences like a local shopping mall and the protection of a 13-member police force alongside wide-open vistas that hearken back to an earlier time — thanks in large part to High's work.

Development has brought its challenges, High admits, but those have been minimal. He cites the efforts of the other township officials, staff, and volunteers as the reason for the smooth ride over the last several decades.

“None of this is necessarily because of me,” High says. “We've got good people working here in the township and on the commissions. They're active and very interested in what's going on. They just know what they're doing.”

That might be because they've had a good role model — one who isn't afraid to make the tough decisions.

“You have to listen to everybody but do what you think is best in the end,” High says. “That's why you're there.”

The 85-year-old High plans to retire in December at the end of his eighth term. After all those years of service to the township, its historical commission, and such groups as the Chester County Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Committee, don't expect him to disappear from public life, though.

“I'll probably still go to a meeting now and then,” High says. “After that long, it gets to be a habit!”