

‘Because he cares’

Kenneth Schlegel

Lower Mahanoy Township,

Northumberland County

48 years of service

BY BRENDA WILT / ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Kenneth Schlegel cares about his Northumberland County township and the people who live there. He cares so much that at the age of 83, he still makes the rounds of Lower Mahanoy Township every morning to check on all the roads and see if there are any problems that need to be addressed. The thing is, he’s not the roadmaster or even on the public works crew.

“He does that at his own expense, in his own vehicle, just because he cares,” says Larry Adams, chairman of the Lower Mahanoy Township Board of Supervisors and Schlegel’s long-time colleague. “Kenny checks everything out and lets me know if anything needs to be taken care of.”

Adams says that caring attitude and the interest Schlegel takes in the township is what has kept him in office for nearly five decades.

Pushing for progress

A lifelong resident of Lower Mahanoy Township, Schlegel ran for office in 1962 to fill a vacancy at the request of the board of supervisors.

“I said I would do it on the condition that I wouldn’t work on the roads or anything like that,” he says. “I had a poultry farm and a fruit farm to run.”

Now that he’s retired from farming, Schlegel has plenty of time to make his rounds each morning inspecting the roads, most of which are now paved thanks to his efforts. That accomplishment was not without its difficulties, though.

“Years ago, two of us supervisors pushed for paving certain roads that, at the time, the third supervisor said weren’t worth doing because they had little traffic,” he recalls. “Now they have more traffic than many of the other roads in the township.”

“Kenny pushed to get all the roads paved in the village of Dalmatia — the alleys and everything,” Adams says. “Then he pushed to get the dirt roads paved throughout the township. Now, with the economy, we’re basically just maintaining what we have. The only unpaved roads that are left are all in one area.”

Treating people fairly

Schlegel was also instrumental in forming a sewer and water authority, which eventually bought the water company in Dalmatia and extended the public sewer there and into the village of Hickory Corners.

As any township that has installed or extended public sewer lines knows, it can be a thorny issue among residents. Lower Mahanoy Township managed to avoid the contention because of the supervisors’ foresight in forming the authority.

“Once people found out there was an authority and only the people getting the sewer would pay for it, rather than the whole township, they were OK with it,” Schlegel says.

He admits that the township doesn’t have many contentious issues. That could have a lot to do with his and the other supervisors’ efforts to treat everyone the same.

“If you treat people fairly, they’ll treat you fairly,” he says. “You always have people who think we should be doing this or that, but we try to keep it fair for everyone. You can’t do everything on one side of the township just to please one person. You have to do what’s best for the township, not just the person doing the griping.”

Adams attributes his colleague’s ability to deal with difficult residents to his many years of being a business owner.

“He’s owned an orchard for a long time, and you need to be able to work with people when you’re in that kind of business,” Adams says. “It’s the same way in the township. People complain about something, and you have to be patient.”

After 48 years of being patient, Schlegel is just about ready to hang up his hat. He’ll be 86 when his current term ends in two years, and he thinks that’s a good time to retire.

It wouldn’t be surprising if he kept making his rounds of the township each morning, though.

“I enjoy knowing what’s going on,” he says.

Adams says he’s not sure what it will be like when Schlegel is no longer in office.

“When I first became a supervisor, he helped me learn the ropes,” he says. “We’ve always worked well together.

“It’s a difficult task to be a supervisor,” he adds, “but Kenny has handled it well all these years.”