

Editors, please note: Lee Warfel passed away shortly before this article appeared in the October 2010 issue of the Pennsylvania Township News.

Three of a Kind

Lee Warfel
43 years of service

Gary Miller, Chairman
27 years of service

John Shoop
26 years of service

Wayne Township, Dauphin County

BY BRENDA WILT / ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Wayne Township in Dauphin County, a rural bedroom community north of Harrisburg, is fortunate to have three longtime supervisors keeping an eye on things. Chairman Gary Miller and his colleagues Lee Warfel and John Shoop have collectively devoted 96 years to their community. And to hear them tell it, there have been very few instances of friction on the board of supervisors.

“We’ve known each other all our lives,” Miller says. “Lee and I went to school together with John’s son. We’ve always worked well together. We listen to people, discuss the issue, then make a decision; 99.9 percent of the time we are in complete agreement.”

Giving residents freedom

One of the things they agree on is that their primary goal is keeping the residents happy. For this trio, that means giving their constituents as much freedom as possible while still complying with the many state and federal regulations.

“When I was young, you could build a house and do pretty much what you wanted,” Shoop says. “Now, you have all these rules and regulations from the state and federal governments.”

“As the state and federal laws changed, we updated our ordinances,” Miller says. “We actually put stormwater ordinances into place before they were mandatory.”

Protecting residents’ freedom is what got Miller involved in township government in the first place. Unlike Shoop and Warfel, who were encouraged to run for supervisor by relatives who were involved in the township, Miller had no interest in local government. At least, not until the board began considering an ordinance that he felt would restrict his and others’ normal farming practices.

“I was a dairy and poultry farmer,” he says. “The township was considering an ordinance that regulated items that could be placed on your property. We were concerned that the supervisors didn’t understand the ramifications of such an ordinance. That got me interested in what was going on in the township.

“The following year,” he continues, “a person was running for supervisor who wanted to get that ordinance passed. I decided to run against him because I didn’t want that kind of regulation passed while I was in the township.”

In the end, the other guy decided not to pursue the office, so Miller ran unopposed.

Keeping residents satisfied

Another way the supervisors keep the residents satisfied is by maintaining the roads.

“We have excellent roads in the township,” Warfel says. “They’re all macadam except for one short section.”

Miller is particularly proud of the road maintenance schedule he instituted to keep all of the roads in good shape.

“One of the best things we ever did four or five years ago was blacktop a lot of the roads,” Shoop agrees. “Prices for materials were better then. The very next year, prices went sky high.

“As long as we take care of the roads and keep them open, people are pretty happy,” he says. “I’ve always said we have to try to do what most of the people want most of the time.”

It seems to be working. All three say the most obvious sign that residents are satisfied is the low attendance at township meetings.

In his 43 years in office, Warfel says there have been no big contentious issues. In fact, if someone has a beef, it’s usually road-related. Now that most are blacktopped, there are even fewer complaints, he says.

“For the most part, we have very little attendance at our meetings,” Miller says. “In the rare instances where we have a number of people come to a meeting, I let them

have their say. If you let them get off their chest whatever is bugging them, you can often keep the peace. We've found that when people get worked up about something, if we just explain things thoroughly, the issue often goes away.

"We always ask residents if there's anything they'd like us to do differently," he adds. "Judging by the few that come to meetings, apparently they're satisfied with the way things are."

Giving credit where it's due

Although the three like-minded supervisors work well together, Miller is eager to share the credit for the township's smooth operation with longtime township secretary Shirley Radel.

"She keeps us guys in line," he admits. "She's almost a fourth supervisor. Shirley is the best thing that's ever happened to the township."

The admiration goes both ways.

"You can't ask for better gentlemen," Radel says of the supervisors. "It's just phenomenal working with them."

Radel's praise for her bosses extends beyond her own dealings with them.

"They're interested in what's going on in the township," she says. "They treat everyone equally and try to be fair."

That sense of fairness even led to her job as secretary, in a way. Radel was hired when the board adopted a policy that prohibited supervisors from being employed by the township in that or any other capacity. That makes it easier to deal with personnel issues, Miller says.

“We supervisors will occasionally help the roadmaster if asked,” he says.
“However, we would rather hire people who want part-time work.”

Getting to know the people

As satisfied as the residents of Wayne Township seem to be with their township officials, the supervisors are just as happy with their jobs.

“I like that I get around and meet the people in the township,” Shoop says. “I like talking to them.”

Warfel says he’s learned a lot about environmental issues, such as conservation and stormwater, that he never would have known if he hadn’t been a supervisor.

“It’s an ongoing learning process,” Miller agrees. “You get to know a lot of people you would never have contact with otherwise. And you learn how to get along with people that you may not always agree with.”

Wayne Township’s residents may soon have to say farewell to two members of this popular trio. Shoop and Warfel are considering hanging up their supervisor hats at the end of their current terms due to health issues, but Miller says he’ll stick around a while.

“Until some younger person comes along and wants my job,” he says, “I’ll stay put.”