

SUPERVISOR

HALLOFFAME

Roaring Brook Township in Lackawanna County was in rough shape three decades ago when **Bob Farischon** and **Tony Jordan** stepped in to help right the sinking ship. The result is a thriving municipality where transparency and openness are the rule.

'A Story about Democracy'

Bob Farischon and Tony Jordan
Roaring Brook Township,
Lackawanna County
30 years of service

BY JILL ERCOLINO / MANAGING EDITOR

A disbanded police department. Sunshine Law violations and fines. Two abrupt resignations. Locked doors at the township building.

In 1990, Roaring Brook Township in Lackawanna County was steeped in problems.

"Everything was secretive," says supervisor Tony Jordan, who with neighbor and long-time colleague Bob Farischon stepped up to pull the municipality out of a pool of controversy and reopen it to the public, literally and figuratively. "People who live here today have no idea what went on."

"Back then, the thinking was 'How can I maximize my position with the township to my benefit?'" Farischon adds. "We have turned things around because we always put the township first."

The beginning of the end

The pair moved to the township around the same time in the early 1970s but did not cross paths until they start-



Tony Jordan, left, and Bob Farischon stepped up 30 years ago and helped get Roaring Brook Township back on track after the actions of two previous supervisors had the municipality heading in the wrong direction.

ed attending the supervisors' meetings.

Although from different political parties — Jordan's a Democrat and Farischon is a Republican — each stood out to the other because they had the same questions and concerns about the municipality's leadership.

Turns out, their hunches were correct.

In July 1990, two of the three supervisors voted, without public warning, to disband the township's one-man police

department. That decision, a shock to the many residents who liked and supported the chief, signaled the beginning of the end for the duo who engineered it.

"They had it in their mind that they were going to get rid of the police," Jordan says. "There was no discussion . . . no warning . . . nothing."

Angry and disgusted, Jordan and Farischon formed the Concerned Citizens for Representative Government to investigate the township's finances and

the board's actions.

"We went door to door, along with other volunteers from the township, got signatures on a petition, and collected donations to fund legal action against the township supervisors," Jordan says.

In the months that followed, the two supervisors who disbanded the police department abruptly resigned and were eventually found guilty of violating Pennsylvania's Sunshine Law.

"They left behind handwritten resignations," Jordan says, "locked the front door, and walked away, leaving the township paralyzed with no functioning government for a month and a half."

"I guess they saw the writing on the wall," Farischon says.

Picking up the pieces

The resignations opened the door for the pair's appointment to the board, and one of their first official actions was to reinstate the police department, which has since grown to two full-time and two part-time officers. The department also provides protection to nearby Elmhurst Township.

Rebuilding the township, however, wasn't easy.

At the time, both supervisors had full-time jobs, young families, and a limited understanding of local government administration. Farischon remembers taking a week's vacation just to sort through the township's mail and bills, which had piled up after their predecessors quit.

"I worked morning, noon, and night," he says.

That diligence continues today in Roaring Brook Township, which is nothing like the municipality the pair inherited three decades ago. Jordan, the board's chair, and Farischon are proud of their staff and the good working relationship they have with the other supervisor, Eric Schield.

They say that transparency and openness are the rule, not the exception, in the township today, and public participation is encouraged at meetings.

"What happened back then has shaped our attitude today," Jordan says, "and this truly is a story about democracy in action. Individuals can get involved and make their community better and responsive to the will of the people." ♦

How PSATS has helped these Hall of Famers

Although he's been in office three decades, Tony Jordan says he continues to learn new things and make great contacts each year at PSATS' Annual Conference and Exhibit Show in Hershey.

"We redid our website, and that was the direct result of attending the conference and meeting the vendor," he says. "There are so many good people and so much good information there."

His colleague, Bob Farischon, gives PSATS high marks for its training. "The programs PSATS offers are extremely important to new supervisors and secretaries. They can learn so much from them."



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TIME: See times listed at paazo.org

COST: \$99 for members of the PA Association of Zoning Officials and \$125 for non-members per forum.

REGISTRATION: To register for this seminar, go to paazo.org.

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