

SUPERVISOR

HALLOFFAME

In three decades on the board of supervisors for Greene Township in Erie County, **Clarence Hess** has overseen some significant changes, with more in the works. Near the end of his tenure, Hess plans to stay involved in the township while enjoying some well-deserved leisure time.

One more change

Clarence Hess

Greene Township, Erie County
30 years of service

BY BRENDA WILT / ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Clarence Hess had a bit of a bumpy start to his service in township government. As assistant fire chief, he was asked to submit his name for consideration to replace a supervisor who moved out of town. He was appointed for two years and then ran for election and lost.

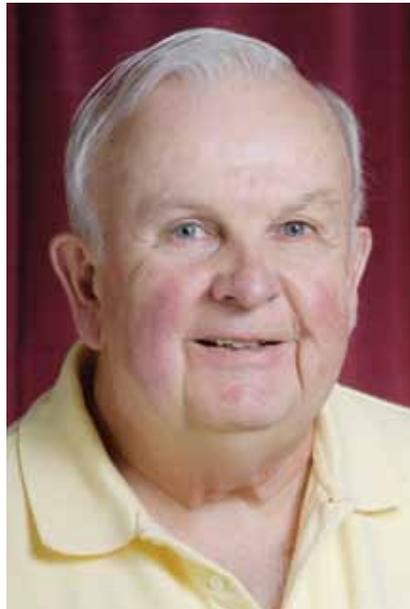
"I was a Republican in a Democratic community," he says matter-of-factly.

Then the man who had defeated Hess in the election decided his insurance business required too much of his time, and he resigned from the board. The supervisors once again appointed Hess to complete the remaining two years of the term.

By this time, he had seen the writing on the wall and changed his political party. When he ran for election at the end of the two years, he won easily and has been on the board ever since.

Significant changes

Originally from Scranton, Hess moved to Greene Township for a job after graduating from college with a degree in electrical engineering. He worked for General Electric, then



Serving his last term as a Greene Township supervisor, Clarence Hess can walk away knowing that he's accomplished a lot, including providing the community with its first municipal building, during his 30 years in public office.

moved to American Sterilizer, and eventually returned to GE, from which he retired.

Despite his stops and starts in public service, Hess has overseen some significant changes in the township during his tenure. Seventy-five percent of the roads were gravel when he entered office, and now all are tar and chip.

The township government went

from operating out of a room in the municipal garage, where diesel fumes were a problem, to occupying a spacious facility.

"The school district had three elementary schools," Hess says. "The one in Greene Township was put up for sale, and the township purchased it about 15 years ago. Now we use it for the municipal building."

Another big change is on the township's doorstep: a public sewer system. "We're located just south of Interstate 90," he says. "To our west is Summit Township, which is growing like crazy right now. We're expecting the development to come this way."

That has prompted the township, which does not have public water or sewer, to work with the state Department of Environmental Protection to install the latter.

"We are not adding public water at this time," he says. "We were advised to do the sewer system because if we bring in water first, people may use more water and cause problems with the onlot septic systems."

As is the case in most communities that switch from onlot systems to a public one, the road has not been easy.

"When people go from having a septic system that they don't pay for to having a monthly fee, they don't like it too much," Hess says.

One of the advantages of having

private wells and septic systems is that whenever the City of Erie started sniffing around the surrounding municipalities with an eye toward annexation, Greene Township hasn't looked very appealing, Hess says.

"Erie keeps getting more development that is tax-exempt," he says. "For example, right near our township is a university. To get a bigger tax base, the city keeps looking at adding the suburbs to the tax rolls. Without water and sewer, they don't really want us."

That has allowed the community to remain basically the same, he says, with the township adding gradual improvements along the way. What will happen once public water and sewer are installed and development increases remains to be seen.

'The main thing is to listen'

Over the years, Hess has learned that the best way to deal with the few residents who come to the township with a problem is just to let them speak their piece.

"You have to give them a chance to express what is bothering them and then try to meet them at least halfway," he says. "See if you can resolve the problem by working around it somehow, but the main thing is to listen to them."

Hess's days of listening to residents' complaints will soon be coming to an end. In fact, seeing the sewer system established will probably be the last major project he will oversee before his term ends in December.

He doesn't plan to abandon local government altogether, though. After 30 years at the township, he can't quite cut the ties that easily and plans to continue to work with emergency management at the township.

Otherwise, his time will be spent with his wife of 50 years, their children and grandchildren, and two German shepherds. And who knows? Perhaps he will find time to take a leisurely drive on those nicely tarred and chipped roads. ♦

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