

HALLOFFAME

Time flies when you're doing something you love, says **Dennis Bunnel**, who's been serving Jessup Township in Susquehanna County for nearly 50 years.

Dedication with a Capital 'D'

Dennis Bunnel

Jessup Township,
Susquehanna County
49 years of service

BY JILL ERCOLINO / MANAGING EDITOR

Dennis Bunnel has a constant companion: his cell phone.

"I sleep with it," says the nine-term supervisor for Jessup Township, Susquehanna County. "I never shut it off. I figure if a resident is going to call me at 2 a.m., it's because they really need help.

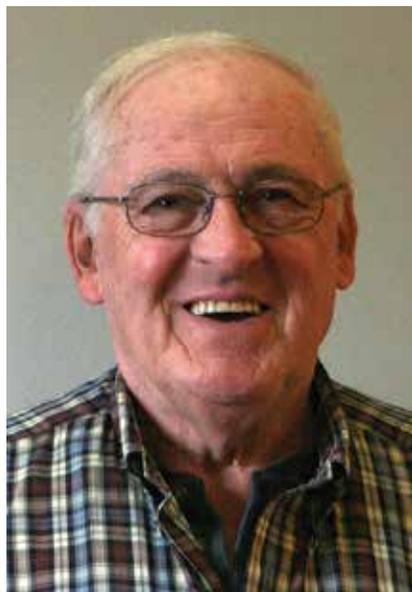
"It's a supervisor's job to protect the health, safety, and welfare of the residents," he adds, "and I live that."

Bunnel pauses for a minute, and his thoughts turn to his family.

He mentions that for 47 of the 49 years that he's been a supervisor, he's also been the township's roadmaster, two jobs that have consumed most of his time and attention. If he wasn't at a meeting, Bunnel was plowing or maintaining the township's roads or taking care of other municipal business.

"They've put up with a lot," he says. "The township always came first."

Bunnel's dedication hasn't gone unnoticed.



After nearly five decades as a supervisor for Jessup Township in Susquehanna County, Dennis Bunnel says he still loves working with people. Being a supervisor isn't a job, he says — it's a life.

Carl Hagstrom moved to Jessup Township in 1982, and for the past decade, has been a regular at the supervisors' meetings. He became so interested in local government, in fact, that he began subscribing to the *Township News*.

"I saw the Hall of Fame feature and all of the good things other supervisors were doing, and I thought, Why not Jessup Township? Why not Denny?"

Building respect, widening roads

It was 1969, and Bunnel was a young man when first elected.

His father had been the township's secretary for many years so the new supervisor understood the ins and outs of local government. He ran for office because he thought he could make a difference in this small, rural community of 500.

And he has.

On the board, Bunnel worked to replace contention with respect. "There had always been issues between the three township supervisors," he says, "but I felt that for the good of the township, we needed to work together.

"Sure, there are going to be disagreements, but you have to be able to work through them. That's the key, and that's what we do."

Bunnel also turned his attention to the township's dirt and gravel roads, 35 miles of which snake through the community.

"Back then, our roads were horrendous," he recalls, adding that the narrow passageways could barely accommodate a single car. "We've widened them now to the point where two tractor-trailers can pass with no problem."

Along the way, the township acquired an old schoolhouse and some adjacent land, which it converted into a

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municipal complex with meeting space for the supervisors and community groups, a garage, and the latest additions: a park, pavilion, playground, and walking trails.

Bunnel says the park and other recent improvements were possible because of the local impact fee assessed on natural gas drillers in the Marcellus Shale and shared with communities statewide. Jessup Township, home to a number of wells, has become a hub for production.

“Before the impact fee, we were just broke,” he says, “but now we’ve been able to update our equipment and our buildings. We’re debt-free and even have some money in the bank. It’s been a blessing.”

Carl Hagstrom believes that Bunnel himself has been a blessing. The supervisor is always there when the community needs him, the resident says.

“Last year, we had awful storms blow through the township,” Hagstrom says, “and trees were down everywhere. Denny and his crew started cleaning things up late that afternoon and were

there until 11 a.m. the next day.

“He’s in his 60s so that gives you an idea of what his dedication is like. This is a man who has given everything he’s got to his community for almost 50 years. What might crush you or me, well, that’s what keeps him going.”

Humble to the core, Bunnel says that taking care of the township is a team effort.

“I’m surrounded by fantastic people, and our residents know if there’s a problem, we’re there,” the supervisor says. “Yes, I’ve been in office 49 years, but it doesn’t seem like it’s been that long because I love people, and I love working with people.”

“This isn’t a job; it’s my life” Bunnel adds, “and I’m happy to say that we get more compliments than complaints.” ♦

How PSATS has helped this Hall of Famer

Dennis Bunnel may have been a township supervisor for nearly 50 years, but that doesn’t mean he has stopped learning — or asking questions.

He says that when a perplexing issue arises, he turns immediately to PSATS.

“They are always there when you need them, and I call them quite often,” he says. “They’re knowledgeable, and you can trust their answers.”

Note: If your township needs help with a local government related matter, call PSATS at (717) 763-0930. You can also find a list of staff email addresses at www.psats.org. (Click on the “About Us” tab and choose “PSATS Staff.”)

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