

HALLOFFAME

Born and raised in Butler Township, Adams County, **Douglas Bower** was appointed to the post of township supervisor at the young age of 20. With 33 years of service now under his belt, his appointment turned out to be the perfect fit for him and the township.

His Roots Run Deep

Douglas Bower
Butler Township, Adams County
33 years of service

BY AMY BOBB / CONTRIBUTING WRITER

When Douglas Bower was appointed a supervisor in Butler Township, Adams County, in December 1983, he was told he was quite possibly the youngest supervisor in the state.

Just 20 years old at the time, he had been working as a laborer for the township for about five months and had only recently begun attending meetings of the board of supervisors to familiarize himself with what was happening in the township.

The other two supervisors must have seen something special in young Bower when they asked him to fill a vacancy on the board because more than 33 years later, he is still there carrying on as roadmaster and chair of the board.

"It was quite a step up when they appointed me to supervisor," he recalls. "I had no clue what was involved. Understanding the rules and regulations and learning the ins and outs of the job was a little overwhelming."

Lucky for the township, Bower did not let his inexperience get in the way of tackling the job head on and gaining knowledge any way he could. It helped that he had good role models, he says.

"The other two supervisors were 30 years my senior at the time, and I learned



Butler Township supervisor and roadmaster Douglas Bower has spent more than three-fifths of his life serving the township where he was born and raised.

a lot from watching and interacting with them," he says. He also turned to PSATS for training and resources.

"I went to the conference my first year in office, and I have been back every year since then," he says, noting that he plans to attend his 34th conference in April. "I also have gone to other seminars and training. PSATS has helped me a lot."

Frugal but effective

Following his appointment to office, Bower ran for township supervisor in the next municipal election, and he has now served as roadmaster and elected official for more than three decades. He took over as chair in 1998 after one of

his mentors on the board passed away. In looking back at his tenure as a public servant, he says he is proud of how the township budget has increased from about \$156,000 to \$1.1 million with a minimal tax increase.

"We raised taxes just once in the time I've been here, and that was a half mill," he says. "I'm pretty frugal, and we have kept our budget tight. I always say if you pinch a penny where you can, you save dollars."

With Bower at the helm, the township has accomplished a lot when it comes to road improvements, says Mike Wertz, who has been a township supervisor for 27 years and worked on the roads alongside Bower for 17 years.

"Doug is the reason our roads are in such good shape," Wertz says. "I count myself among the residents who appreciate that. He's a hard worker and has done a good job for the township."

Since Bower took office, the township has paved its remaining dirt roads, increased its road mileage from 30 to 41 (with additions from the state turnback program), and modernized its equipment.

"When I started, we didn't have the equipment we do now," Bower says, referring to two old dump trucks the three working supervisors and two employees had to work with at the time.

Today, the road crew, which consists of one part-time and two full-time employees (Bower is the only working supervisor these days), has a fleet of six vehicles, including a brand new 2017 International dump truck, at its disposal.

"We downsized our employees but

increased our fleet and its capabilities,” he says.

Peace and quiet

While other communities around the state have experienced growing pains at times, the primarily agricultural community of Butler Township has remained relatively unchanged in the years since Bower was a youngster growing up there.

Not that people haven't tried. About 10 years ago, the township was hit simultaneously with three major development plans proposing 3,000 to 4,000 units.

“It was one of the most stressful times as chair of the board,” Bower recalls. “Our township has a population of 2,700, and we wouldn't have been able to handle that large an increase in housing and population.”

The township had to move its meetings to the high school auditorium to accommodate the large number of residents who showed up, mainly to protest the proposals. Eventually, the plans fell through when the developers couldn't meet the regulations for sewer and water.

Bower acknowledges that the job of running a township has evolved in the 33 years since he started when a “handshake and a gentleman's agreement” were enough to make something happen.

“There are more rules and regulations than there were in the '80s,” he says, “and there's a lot more paperwork than there used to be.”

Yet Butler Township still feels like a big neighborhood to him, and his philosophy when it comes to governing is to use common sense. “Know the township and what its capabilities are and follow the rules and regulations,” he says.

His roots run deep in Butler Township. He was born and raised there, just like his mother, and his father once served as the township tax collector. Bower says that knowing he has the support of the community and his family makes the job of serving the township more rewarding.

Bower, who turns 54 in May, figures he has a lot of years yet to give back to his beloved township.

“I'll continue here as long as I can and my health holds out,” he says. “I enjoy the work and like helping the people of this community.” ♦

How PSATS has helped this Hall of Famer

Since becoming a supervisor at the age of 20, Douglas Bower of Butler Township has turned to PSATS to help make him a better public servant. “There is so much knowledge at PSATS,” he says. “It's nice to know that if I'm ever in a bind or predicament, I can get a hold of someone who knows more than I do.”

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