

HALLOFFAME

A public servant for more than 50 years, **Robert Weer** has spent the past three decades using humor and a listening ear to help guide East Marlborough Township, Chester County, through some growing pains.

A People Person

Robert Weer
East Marlborough Township,
Chester County
30 years of service

BY **BRENDA WILT** / ASSISTANT EDITOR

Public service has been a part of Robert Weer's life since a young age. He joined the Po-Lin-Mar Fire Company in Chester County at age 18 and served five four-year terms on the Unionville-Chadds Ford School Board beginning in 1967.

At the end of his fourth term, one of the East Marlborough Township supervisors who was going off the board encouraged Weer to run for the seat. He did, was elected, and has been on the board ever since.

Weer has lived in the township since his family moved to the Village of Unionville in 1936, when Weer was just a year old. Although he lives elsewhere in the township now, his first home left a lasting impression.

"I like to say you can take me out of Unionville, but you can't take Unionville out of me," he quips.

In addition to his public service, Weer worked for Delmarva Power and Light Co., first as a draftsman in the engineering department and then as a construction manager, eventually overseeing construction of a new operations center near Newark, Del. Weer retired in 1994 after 40 years with the company.



After 50 years of public service, first serving 20 years on the local school board and the last 30 on the board of supervisors for East Marlborough Township, Chester County, Robert Weer is getting ready to call it quits at the end of 2017. Involvement in the community has been a family affair for Weer, whose sons, daughter, and son-in-law have all answered the call to public service.

Building a township

East Marlborough Township was just entering a growth period when Weer took office.

"In 1987, there were a lot of subdivisions going in," he says. "About that time, we also got our first traffic light. We started public sewage in the 1990s to provide service to Unionville and gradually added sidewalks."

Although public sewage is often a contentious issue in townships, Weer says there was no pushback from residents when it was proposed.

"We wanted to provide public sewage for the village and the elementary school," he says. "Around the same time, a developer bought land and wanted to put in 162 homes. It would have cost the developer more than \$1 million to install a sewer plant for just that development.

"Instead, it gave the township \$1.1 million to put in sewage lines and a treatment plant. We've added on to the system over the years as more housing developments and commercial properties have sprung up."

Public sewage may not have been a contentious issue, but it was a different story when Walmart came to town, Weer says. It took 30 hearings over several years to get the conditional use permit in place, and residents had lots of opinions.

"There was a lot of controversy about it," Weer says. "When the hearings first started, lots of people came. The numbers dropped off as the hearings continued."

"Bob is always responsive to input from residents," planning commission chairman Cuyler Walker says. "He is particularly concerned about the effect development may have on neighbors and tries to protect their interests and minimize any impact to them."

Perhaps the amenity the long-time supervisor is most proud of is Unionville

“We’re each **entitled to our opinion.** That’s what democracy is all about.”

Community Park, a passive recreation area that is in its final stages of development. The park is on a former farm and at one time held the house Weer grew up in. He has fond recollections of sledding and playing on the property as a child.

‘I try to be a people person’

Having an opportunity to serve the people and exert some influence in the local community is what has kept Weer on the board, he says.

“Over the years, I have been challenged a few times in elections, but I must have made most of the people happy,” he says. “Since I announced that I wasn’t going to run again for supervisor this year, people have asked me to reconsider.”

“Bob does a great job of expressing to residents why the board is taking certain actions,” Walker says. “He takes the time to explain the framework in which decisions are made, which allows residents to go away feeling that they have been heard even if they didn’t get everything they had hoped for.”

Weer’s low-key approach to problem-solving probably has led to his longevity on the board as well. He says he responds to residents’ issues by just sitting down with them and hearing what they have to say.

“We talk it out and figure out what can be done,” he says. “I try to be a people person and reason with people. I’ll inject a little humor when things get tense.”

He likes to tell a funny story about teacher contract negotiations when he was the new guy on the school board.

“This was before collective bargaining,” he says. “I was asked to serve on the salary committee, and we met with teacher representatives to negotiate contracts. When I walked in the room, there sat my former physical education teacher. He took one look at me, threw up his hands, and said, ‘Oh, no, now we’re in trouble!’ I told him, ‘Mr. Reynolds, paybacks are hell.’”

Weer has also learned to listen and talk things out when working with his fellow supervisors.

“There have been times when I’ve been in opposition to the rest of the board,” he says. “I tend to be conservative and am always concerned about dollars and cents, but we can agree to disagree. Once we take action, we move on.”

“I try to maintain a good working relationship with the others,” he adds. “We’re each entitled to our opinion. That’s what democracy is all about.”

Walker, who served on the board of supervisors with Weer for 18 years, says that although Weer is a staunch advocate for what he believes, when the inevitable differing points of view come up, he never lets things become confrontational.

“He doesn’t back down, but he remains calm and respectful,” Walker says. “He has set the tone for cooperation and collegiality that makes it a pleasure to serve with him. As he likes to say, we can disagree but it doesn’t mean we have to be disagreeable.”

Inspiring the next generation

Although Weer is hanging up his supervisor hat at the end of this year, his family will continue in public service. Just as Weer followed in the footsteps of his grandfather, a local businessman who served on the school board and was very active in the community, Weer’s children will continue to carry the banner.

His youngest son, also named Robert, is a supervisor and fire marshal for London Grove Township in Chester County. Weer’s other son, John, is the Chester County fire marshal.

Weer’s daughter, Blair Fleishmann, is executive director of the Kennett Square-based conservation organization S.A.V.E. She also serves on the Brandywine Conservancy’s environmental committee, the Chester County Historic Preservation Network board, and the Upper Oxford Township Historical Commission and is treasurer of the Oxford Regional Emergency Management Group. Her husband, Charlie, is a supervisor for Upper Oxford Township, where the couple lives on a preserved farm.

Weer himself says he will continue to take an interest in emergency services in the community after he retires from the board and will probably remain involved with the fire company. That’s when he’s not at the shore, however, where he intends to spend more time with his wife of 62 years once his time is his own.

He is thankful for his time at the township, he says, which has given him an appreciation for how government works.

“This is the lowest level of public service, but you can begin to see how government should operate at all levels,” he says. “You have to learn to compromise and listen to the concerns of the public.”

“The most admirable thing about Bob is that his highest priority is doing what is best for the township and community,” Walker says. “He is always most interested in protecting and preserving the quality of life we have. I think he really epitomizes what we all value and admire in a public servant.” ♦

How PSATS has helped this Hall of Famer

Robert Weer says that PSATS has been very helpful over his three decades as a township supervisor. The 82-year-old attended nearly every Annual Conference in his younger years.

“The conference is a great asset, especially for new supervisors,” he says. “It’s a good way to educate yourself about local government.”

Weer has also looked to the *Township News* magazine for information, especially on pending legislation.

“The magazine updates you on what’s happening in Harrisburg,” he says. “It’s helpful to know what PSATS’ position is on a particular piece of legislation and why the Association supports or opposes it.”