

HALLOFFAME

Over the last four decades, Fairfield Township in Lycoming County has transformed from a farming community of 500 residents to a suburban township of nearly 3,000. Along the way, **Ronald Springman** has kept pace while his job as secretary-treasurer has expanded to match the evolution of the township.

The 40-Year Evolution of a Township Secretary

Ronald Springman

Fairfield Township, Lycoming County
40 years of service

BY AMY BOBB / CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Ronald Springman was 37 years old and working as an accountant for a local company when one of his township supervisors approached him in 1975 about becoming the Fairfield Township secretary.

“He knew I had graduated from Penn State with an accounting degree, and they needed someone to handle their finances when the former secretary retired,” he recalls. “I said, ‘OK, I’ll try it for a year or so.’ Now, ask me how that worked out.”

The answer must be pretty good since 40 years later, Springman still remains secretary-treasurer of this Lycoming County municipality.

“He’s a very dedicated employee who has done a lot of good things for the township, often working practically for nothing,” says Bob Wein, who had served as a township supervisor for 25-plus years and now is the township’s part-time manager. “Certainly, after being somewhere for 40 years, he has developed a lot of knowledge that we have come to rely on.”

During his years of township service,



One of the ways that secretary-treasurer Ronald Springman has been able to stay up-to-date on the requirements of the job is by attending the PSATS Annual Educational Conference. “I always pick up good information there,” he says.

Springman has watched his hours and responsibilities evolve as the township itself has grown and developed from a farming community of maybe 500 residents to a suburban township of nearly 3,000.

“I really had no idea I’d be here this long,” he says. “I took the job because I thought it would be a challenge and provide some extra pocket change.”

A growing township

For the first 28 years in the position,

Springman was able to complete the tasks of secretary-treasurer in the evenings and on weekends operating from his home when he wasn’t at work at his day-time job. Then, 12 years ago, at the age of 65, he retired from full-time employment but decided to stay on as the part-time township secretary-treasurer.

By this time, too, the secretary-treasurer job at Fairfield Township had been steadily growing in demands and responsibilities, requiring him to increase his hours and to move his office and decades’ worth of records from his home to the township building.

Back when Springman first became secretary-treasurer, Fairfield Township was primarily a farming community. Homes in the township were served strictly by on-lot septic systems, and less than half of the township’s 29 miles of roads were paved. The township supervisors who worked the roads at that time relied on just one small grader to repair roads and plow snow, a slow, arduous task that could take days after a big snowstorm. Springman’s duties during this relatively quiet period consisted mainly of recording meetings and handling the township’s finances.

Over the decades, Springman has had a front-row seat as the township evolved into a suburban community. On the heels of a few large developments, a municipal authority was created that now provides sewer to about half the township. And township residents, no longer content to wait days af-

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ter a snowstorm for roads to be cleared, can expect up to three snowplows on the roads at the first sign of a snowflake.

“I live a half-mile from the township building, and when I first started to travel there, I used to pass maybe eight houses along that road. Now it is more like 208 houses,” says Springman, who is a lifelong resident and has raised two daughters in the township.

Compared to the dozen or so farms that encompassed the township of his youth, only one farm remains in operation today. About five years ago, development in the area was further accelerated when natural gas drillers began moving in and sparking manufacturing and industrial growth along with the expected conflict and controversy that the gas industry sometimes brings.

Embracing technology

Throughout Springman's decades of dedicated service, township residents have benefited the most from the secretary's financial acumen. “He helps to keep expenses down,” says Wein. “He's very shrewd and will shop for bargains.”

He also played a role in the supervisors' action decades ago to eliminate the township property tax, a decision that remains in effect today. “We pay for our roads through liquid fuels funds and other expenses through various employment taxes,” Wein explains, “but we don't have a real estate tax in our township, and Ron is one of the reasons we can keep our taxes down.”

These days, in addition to the normal slew of activities for which a modern municipality is responsible, the township's time is occupied by holding sometimes-contentious public hearings on Marcellus Shale permits and ensuring compliance with increasingly demanding Chesapeake Bay stormwater mandates.

“This job has changed quite a bit over the years with all the rules and

regulations we have to follow now,” says Springman, who estimates he works at least 25 to 30 hours a week compared to maybe 10 when he first took the job.

Among the many changes he has witnessed during his tenure, one of the most obvious involves technology. Forty years ago, he recorded the township minutes in longhand. Today, he uses the computer to complete that task as well as most others, including the on-line filing of required state forms.

At the age of 77, he has readily embraced technology as a way to make his job easier, but he admits he occasionally will need to ask for help when tackling

unfamiliar programs.

“As I get older, I don't always know all the latest links and buttons to push,” he says. “When I retire, I will definitely recommend that they bring in someone who is up-to-date with computers and knows the latest software programs.”

Not that Springman has any immediate plans to retire from his long-held position with the township.

“Maybe in a few years when I'm 80,” he says. All the same, after four decades of service, he is in no rush to call it quits.

“It keeps me busy and out of trouble,” he says, “and they seem to like me here.” ♦

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