

HALLOFFAME

Over nearly three decades, supervisor **Victor Berger** has worked hard to preserve the rural character of Greenwich Township in Berks County, ensuring that it will be a good place to live for a long time to come.

'A local guy'

Victor Berger

Greenwich Township, Berks County
29 years of service

BY BRENDA WILT / ASSOCIATE EDITOR

"Controlled growth" is how Victor Berger sums up his approach to preserving the rural environment of his community. The longtime supervisor for Greenwich Township in Berks County has worked hard over nearly three decades to make sure that the township does not lose the characteristics that make it a nice place to live and raise a family.

"We're really tough on development," Berger says. "Before we updated our zoning, about a quarter to a third of the township was zoned agricultural. Three years ago, we asked some of our property owners if they wanted to go into agricultural zoning, and 95 percent agreed. At least half of the township is now zoned agricultural."

"It was the people's choice; we didn't force it," he quickly adds. "We're trying to keep it rural but also attract some business, within limits. We don't want a Walmart or anything like that."

Berger is not afraid to take the bull by the horns to keep the township the way it is, even if it's a very big bull. PennDOT is planning major work on Interstate 78, which runs through Greenwich Township. The original plans called for a large roundabout smack in the middle of the



Preserving Greenwich Township's rural characteristics has been important to supervisor Victor Berger. As one township official says: "He's a local guy and knows the community well. He's concerned about what people think and wants to do what's best for them."

township's commercial district, taking a lot of the land with it. Berger made phone calls to legislators, the governor's office, and PennDOT to raise a fuss.

"After a lot of talk, PennDOT changed the plans and preserved most of our commercial land," Berger says.

Working for the residents

It is that willingness to speak up and

act in the best interest of the entire township that makes Berger a good supervisor, planning commission member Oscar Klimesmith says. Klimesmith is a former supervisor for the township, as well as neighboring Albany Township.

During his 20 years at Albany Township, Klimesmith worked with Berger through an intermunicipal agreement the two communities had with nearby Maxatawny Township. Later, he joined the Greenwich Board of Supervisors and continued the successful working relationship.

"I was the roadmaster for Greenwich Township while Victor was the assistant," he recalls. "He and I discussed every road project together. We disagreed sometimes, but then we worked it out."

"We worked hard to get the zoning straightened out to keep the township on the rural side," he adds. "We managed to shoot down two big subdivisions and got a number of farms preserved."

Greenwich Township secretary-treasurer Alice Flyte agrees that Berger is always working for the residents.

"He's a local guy and knows the community well," she says. "He's concerned about what people think and wants to do what's best for them."

Spending wisely

Berger entered public service at a fairly young age. A farmer by trade, he worked part-time for the township in the early 1980s doing odds and ends and some maintenance to earn a little extra income. ➤

**"It's a lot about how municipalities run their 'business.'
We don't spend beyond our means."**

SUPERVISOR HALL OF FAME

"In 1983, one of the supervisors resigned, and the other two asked me if I'd be interested in running for the position," he says. "I thought, 'What the heck. I might as well try it.'"

The supervisors appointed him to fill the vacancy, and then he ran to finish the final two years of the term. Next came election to a full six-year term, followed by several subsequent terms.

Thinking back to his early years in Greenwich government, Berger says the township has grown fivefold in its assets. When he began, the township had a small three-bay garage with a very small office attached.

"We had all the meetings at the local elementary school," he recalls. "Over time, we renovated our building and added a six-bay garage, an office, a storage room, and a meeting room."

The township purchased an adjacent 52 acres, upgraded its equipment, and put up some pole buildings, all on a \$650,000 budget.

"It's a lot about how municipalities run their 'business,'" he says. "We don't spend beyond our means. We have a small fire tax to help the three fire companies in other townships that serve our community, and we still have a low millage compared to other townships."

Working together

Although Berger and his fellow supervisors do not always agree on every issue, they do agree on one thing: doing what is best for the community.

"If you stick to your guns and you have the rules and the laws in front of you, you know what you can do," Berger says. "We don't take sides. We make decisions based on what is good for all the people, not certain individuals."

The township's small workforce — one part-time secretary-treasurer and four full-time and three-part time road crew members — have that same attitude about each other, the supervisor says.

"Everyone works together," he says. "We don't have one person pulling one way and someone else pulling another way."

The township's rural landscape, punctuated by controlled growth, serves

as a fitting legacy for a man who simply wanted the quiet township he calls home to remain that way.

"I feel good about where the community has been and where it is going,"

Berger says. "It's the community where I have lived my whole life. I raised my kids here, and they're raising my grandchildren here. I want to keep it a good place to live." ♦



COUNTY ASSOCIATION

Upcoming Conventions

SEPTEMBER

September 8: Carbon County

September 10: Cameron County

September 13: Washington County

September 14: Fayette County

September 19: Wyoming County

September 20: Blair (tentative), Bradford, Clarion, and Tioga Counties

September 22: Potter County

September 26: Elk and Venango County

September 28: Cambria, Montgomery (tentative), and Northampton Counties

OCTOBER

October 2: Sullivan County

October 3: Snyder County

October 4: Cumberland and Dauphin (tentative) Counties

October 5: Clearfield and Pike Counties

October 8: Fulton County

October 10: Wayne County

October 11: Columbia, Huntingdon, Jefferson, and Monroe (tentative), Counties

October 15: Bedford and Warren Counties

October 16: Crawford County (tentative)

October 17: Schuylkill County (tentative)

October 18: Berks, Greene, Lebanon, Montour, and Union Counties

October 24: Mifflin County

October 25: Erie, Franklin (tentative), Lycoming (tentative), Mercer (tentative), Northumberland, and Susquehanna Counties

October 26: Beaver County

October 30: Centre County

NOVEMBER

November 2: Juniata County (tentative)

November 5: Lancaster County

November 7: Adams County (tentative)

November 8: Chester, Delaware (tentative), and York Counties

NOTE: The counties in bold are those that had confirmed dates when the News went to press. For the most current location, time, and contact person for each county convention, call PSATS at (717) 763-0930 or go to www.psats.org and choose "County Associations" under the "Links" tab.