

SUPERVISOR

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For more than three decades, **Paul Wentzler** has worked to improve Muncy Township in Lycoming County by taking the long view and thinking carefully before making decisions. His methodical approach to problem-solving has enabled the community to keep its rural, historical character while still moving forward.

## Slow and steady

**Paul Wentzler**  
Muncy Township, Lycoming County  
31 years of service

BY **BRENDA WILT** / ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Paul Wentzler is the embodiment of the adage, “Slow and steady wins the race.” Like the proverbial tortoise that beat the hare by moving slowly and methodically forward, Wentzler has spent more than three decades moving Muncy Township in Lycoming County forward by thinking carefully before acting.

“I try to work things out for the betterment in the long term, not just tomorrow,” he says. “Sometimes it’s better to be a little more conservative and think through what you’re going to do before doing it.”

Being slow and methodical, rather than indulging in knee-jerk reactions, has allowed the board of supervisors to preserve the integrity of this semi-rural, historic community and make long-term improvements, Wentzler says.

### Giving back

A lifelong resident of Muncy Township, Wentzler lives on the once-working dairy farm that has been in his family



**Paul Wentzler ran for township supervisor because he wanted to give back to the community. That’s exactly what he’s been doing for the last 31 years.**

for more than a century. He and his wife of 20 years sold the cattle in 1998, freeing up his time to work for the township road crew. A newly hired full-time worker at the township will allow Wentzler to begin scaling back the hours he puts in on the roads.

The long-time supervisor began his involvement in local government at the urging of a local resident, who encouraged Wentzler, a college graduate and working farmer, to run for supervisor.

“I figured maybe it was time to start

giving something back to the community,” he says.

He has been chairman for nearly all of the 31 years he’s been in office and, as the longest-serving supervisor on the board, has knowledge of the township that often comes in handy.

“I’m the one who remembers what happened in the past that affects whether we can do something today,” he says.

On the other hand, Wentzler is open to learning new things and putting them to work in the township.

“I try to learn and share that knowledge to make the community a better place,” he says. “When you stop learning and stop trying to move forward, that’s when it’s time to leave.”

Like Wentzler, Muncy Township is a mix of old and new. Home to a historic village and some of the oldest houses in Lycoming County, the community also boasts a large regional shopping mall and an interstate running right through the center of the township. While it has no natural gas wells, surrounding municipalities do, as well as the businesses that support the industry. Heavy truck traffic also passes through the township.

Although the township resisted zoning for many years, the board of supervisors put together a comprehensive plan that works with the county’s subdi-

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vision and land development plan. The township gets the benefit of county staff while preserving the character of the community, Wentzler says.

### Slow and steady spending

The Muncy Township supervisors have followed Wentzler's slow and steady philosophy when it comes to spending money, too. When Wentzler first took office, the township secretary worked out of her home, and the "garage" consisted of a rented building with the equipment parked outside. Fire department facilities were used for meetings.

More than 30 years later, the township operates out of a used building that sits on a piece of land the municipality purchased some years ago.

"I'd like to see us get a new building," Wentzler says, "but we have more needs than we have a budget for."

Take the roads, for instance. Like many townships, Muncy has begun using tar and chip as a surface treatment to save money because of the skyrocketing costs of pavement.

"The sheer cost of things is just astronomical," Wentzler says. "Now you need permits for this and permits for that. You have to have an engineer come out to put in a drainage pipe. In the old days, you just rolled up your sleeves and did it."

"Our taxes have not gone up that much, and people don't realize that we have to buy tires, pay for repairs, and lots of other things," he adds. "They don't realize how much it all costs."

To stay within the budget, the township buys used equipment whenever it can.

"You have to be practical and realistic about what you are able to do," Wentzler says. "You have to squeeze as much from every dollar as you can."

### Positive reinforcement

The biggest hurdle facing townships, Wentzler believes, is the shift that has occurred in people's concept of community.

"Years ago, the local school, fire department, and churches were the hub of the community," he says. "You no longer have that community spirit. There are so many demands on people today

that it is hard to sustain volunteer fire departments. If we would have to go to paid departments, who knows what that would cost."

The aging of the population has contributed to the problem, Wentzler believes.

"We have decreasing numbers of young people stepping up," he says. "You can't expect a handful of senior citizens to go out there and 'save the world' all the time. This is going to be quite an obstacle to overcome in the coming years."

Even Wentzler plans to hang up his

hat after his current term ends in five years. He says the only reason he stayed in office this long is because he always had projects that he wanted to finish, so he'd run again. Plus, he was always hoping someone would step up to serve in what he admits is mostly a thankless job.

"There's only a very small percentage of people who will thank you or say 'job well-done,'" he says. "That's what keeps you going, that little bit of positive reinforcement."

After all, it worked for the tortoise, didn't it? ♦



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