

SUPERVISOR

HALLOFFAME

Life in rural Reed Township, Dauphin County, is generally simple and quiet, thanks in part to supervisor **Keith Rainey**, who has helped to keep things running smoothly at the township for more than three decades.

Small and Unique

Keith Rainey

Reed Township, Dauphin County
32 years of service

BY AMY BOBB / ASSISTANT EDITOR

With fewer than 200 residents, Reed Township is the smallest municipality in Dauphin County. Right off the bat, Keith Rainey, a supervisor for 32 years, will tell you that governing a community the size of his isn't all that complicated.

"There's no zoning in the township, which pleases most of the people who live here," he says. "As long as they are not infringing on a neighbor, they have the right to do what they want on their land."

The township also no longer maintains its 4.3 miles of road, choosing to contract instead with nearby Halifax Borough for plowing and a local paving company to fill potholes and perform other maintenance. Neighboring fire companies and the State Police provide crucial emergency services.

With never too much on the agenda, the supervisors' monthly meetings tend to last an hour, although they have



Several years after Keith Rainey moved to Reed Township, he became a township supervisor. He's still there 32 years later and plans to keep serving "as long as the good Lord is willing."

ensured an efficiently run township.

"We keep trying to cut expenses and are careful with our spending," he says, noting proudly that the township has not raised taxes since he's been in office.

With a nearly \$220,000 annual budget, the township supervisors are always on the lookout for ways to save money. Several years ago, they did a study that showed it was cheaper to contract the road work out than to operate and maintain two trucks and a building.

"It's a win-win for us," Rainey says. "We don't have to maintain trucks or perform the work, and the contractors come quickly when called upon."

The arrangement works well, and complaints from residents are few and far between.

"At an average meeting, we may see one to three residents," he says. "If there's more than that, then we may have an issue. Probably someone's road wasn't plowed fast enough or swept right after a tar and chip."

been known to wrap up in 15 minutes if Rainey, who serves as chair of the board, isn't there.

"He's the man with the silver tongue," says J. Stephen Allen, who has worked alongside Rainey for close to 25 years, first as a fellow supervisor and now in his current role as secretary-treasurer. "He has a lot of experience and is very knowledgeable."

Keeping complaints down

Over the decades, Rainey's dedication to his adopted community has

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By far, the most common complaint is that a tree or large limb has fallen onto a road. Those reports come in at all hours, and then either Allen or Rainey will head out with a chainsaw to cut and move it.

As the long-time supervisor notes, "We are very, very small. I don't know how else to put it."

An identity crisis

Despite its small, rural character, Reed Township has unique qualities that Rainey likes to point out. The community, which sits at the intersection of the Susquehanna River, the Juniata River, and the Appalachian Trail, has numerous hiking, fishing, paddling, and birdwatching opportunities. It also has state game lands and some farmland.

But it's the township's unique geography that provides what could be called an "identity crisis" at times for the community. Located about 12 miles upriver of Harrisburg, the township's western-most section has the distinction of being the only piece of Dauphin County situated on the west shore of the Susquehanna River. (*Elsewhere, the river separates Dauphin County in the east from Perry County in the west.*) Anyone who has ever traveled along routes 22/322 and across the Clarks Ferry Bridge is familiar with this area, which is home to a Sheetz, a Rutter's, the Red Rabbit Drive-in, and several long-standing adult entertainment shops.

"Everyone thinks they are in Perry County when they travel through there, but they're not. They're in our township," Rainey explains.

The folks in Reed Township refer to this well-traveled area as "the island," which is what it was until the river was partially filled in sometime in the late 1800s to form a peninsula. Rainey notes that this area contains about 99% of the township's commercial development.

To further complicate matters, the township is served by three State Police barracks, has three different telephone exchanges (*one being a long-distance call for the other two*), and uses two different towns for mailing addresses. In addition, the township's children are

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Keith Rainey believes the Association's best value comes from its monthly magazine and the Annual Conference. "I like networking with others from small townships and attending seminars on small-township issues at the conference," he says. "I learn something every year I go. The best place to learn is Donuts with Dave."

the only Dauphin County students to attend Susquenita School District in Perry County. This decision dates to the 1950s when school districts were consolidated across the state, Rainey explains, and the closer Halifax schools didn't want to send buses over what was then called the "skinny bridge" to pick up students on the island.

Over the years, some residents have complained about the unequal property assessment rates between the two counties, which they believe causes them to pay more in school taxes.

"It's an ongoing issue that is not easily resolved," Rainey says.

All in the family

About the only other issue that nags at Rainey is how to get more people involved in local government. He points to how the township has had trouble finding someone to fill one of its two member seats on the Halifax Area Recreation Authority board.

"We've asked for years and years," he says. "It seems that young families today are busier than ever and don't have the time to get involved."

When it comes to finding willing volunteers, township officials must often turn to family members. Rainey's wife, Millie, has served on the recre-

ation authority board for several years, and she chairs the board of auditors. His son-in-law recently filled a vacancy on the board of supervisors. Allen's wife is the other supervisor, and relatives of former and current township supervisors round out the auditors.

"We're a close-knit group," Rainey says, "but if anyone wants to come and look at our books, they can. We have nothing to hide."

Meanwhile, he continues to personally invite residents to township meetings, which is how he was first exposed to local government soon after moving to Reed Township in the mid-1980s. His next-door neighbor, a township supervisor, asked him to come to meetings and help with roadwork. Later, when a supervisor retired, Rainey agreed to fill the seat.

"Once it got started, it's like a marriage," he says with a chuckle. "It's not over until someone dies."

During his decades of service, he has observed how supervisors in rural areas tend to stay on the job until their health prevents it.

"I, too, hope to be here as long as I can," says Rainey, who turned 77 in January. "I have no desire to step down as long as the good Lord is willing and I'm able." ♦

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