

# HALLOFFAME

**Marilyn Zona** has lived on the same road her entire life. She likes the small-town, tight-knit feel of her township and is proud to have served it for the past four decades and counting.

## Many Hats

**Marilyn Zona**

Marion Township, Beaver County  
40 years of service

BY AMY BOBB / ASSISTANT EDITOR

The supervisors in Marion Township, Beaver County, have a running joke with their secretary.

“Who are you today?” they ask me when they come in,” Marilyn Zona says. They may find her troubleshooting a waterline problem, checking on a zoning problem, or cleaning the bathroom. “It’s all just part of my job. I wear many hats.”

Surprisingly, for a small, rural township of just over 900 residents, Marion Township has its fair share of activity. It staffs its own police department of two full-time and three part-time officers and manages a public water system that serves 105 customers.

For the past 40 years, Zona has been front and center, donning her various hats — from secretary-treasurer to zoning officer to unofficial janitor — to help keep things humming along.

### In her father’s footsteps

Life as the Marion Township secretary wasn’t always so busy.

Zona, who grew up on a dairy farm where her family grows crops and raises beef cattle today, was first appointed to the post in January 1979. Her father was a township supervisor at the time, an office he held from 1968 to 2004, including a stint as secretary. Zona would work alongside her dad for more than



25 years, initially learning the ropes from him before the board of supervisors hired her at the age of 24.

“I made \$200 a month at first,” she recalls. “It was very part time.”

For the first 10 years, she would manage township business from an office in her home, which provided her the flexibility to work while tending to her two children. In 1988, the board decided to construct a municipal building, and not long after Zona moved her office there, things began to get more eventful in the township.

Around that time, VEKA, a vinyl manufacturer, came to town, lured in part by a state grant that secured a new road, a waterline, and a sewage treatment plant for the company. The state would eventually turn these services over to the township to operate and maintain, and additional customers were hooked up to the public water

**“Everyone knows your name,” Marilyn Zona says about the tight-knit community where she serves as secretary. Her family, too, has been a source of support. Her father was a long-time township supervisor, and Zona and her husband of 46 years live on the same road as their son, daughter, niece, and nephew. Together, they manage the ancestral farm.**

system. *(To this day, the township-owned sewage treatment plant only serves VEKA as it hasn’t proven cost-effective yet to enlarge the plant for public use, Zona says.)*

The township continued to welcome other companies, including Honeywell, which produces such niche metals as titanium and nickel, and Great Southern Wood, which makes outdoor wood products. The township also hosts five gas wells with two more slated to go on line next year.

Despite all this activity, however, the township remains mostly rural and agricultural. Zona notes that many property owners have chosen to preserve their farms, and with little residential development to speak of, the township population hasn’t grown much.

### Expanding horizons

Looking back over the past 40 years, Zona is proud of what her township has accomplished, from organizing a popular community day for the past 20 summers to hosting a recycling program that her son helped start in the early 1990s while a high school student.

“Our recycling is very clean and desirable,” Zona says, explaining why

the program continues to be successful despite a recent worldwide downturn in the recyclables market.

Over the years, the township has also reaped the benefits of technology, which has helped to streamline her job.

“Everything used to be done strictly on paper,” she says, recalling the days before computers when she had to write out water bills by hand.

Staying abreast of technology was a big change, Zona admits, but she has never been one to shy away from challenges. While others her age may be thinking about coasting into retirement — she turned 65 in August — she continues to seek out new opportunities and learn new things.

For the past five years, she has served on the planning committee tasked with developing an annual two-day county conference for municipalities in Beaver County, and recently she has become a Power of One volunteer at PSATS’ Annual Conference.

“I’ve met some strong leaders through this work, and it’s really changed my outlook,” Zona says. “I’ve discovered that sitting and talking with others makes me feel more confident, like I can face the world.”

### No slowing down

Zona is in no real hurry to retire. “Maybe in another year or two I will,” she says, noting that she would probably spend more time pursuing her favorite pastimes, which include kayaking, gardening, running, working on the family farm, and relaxing at the condo she and her husband own on the

Alabama Gulf Coast.

Until then, however, she shows no signs of slowing down. In fact, she recently donned her “advocate hat” to challenge her county commissioners to reinvest in a neglected county-owned park in the township.

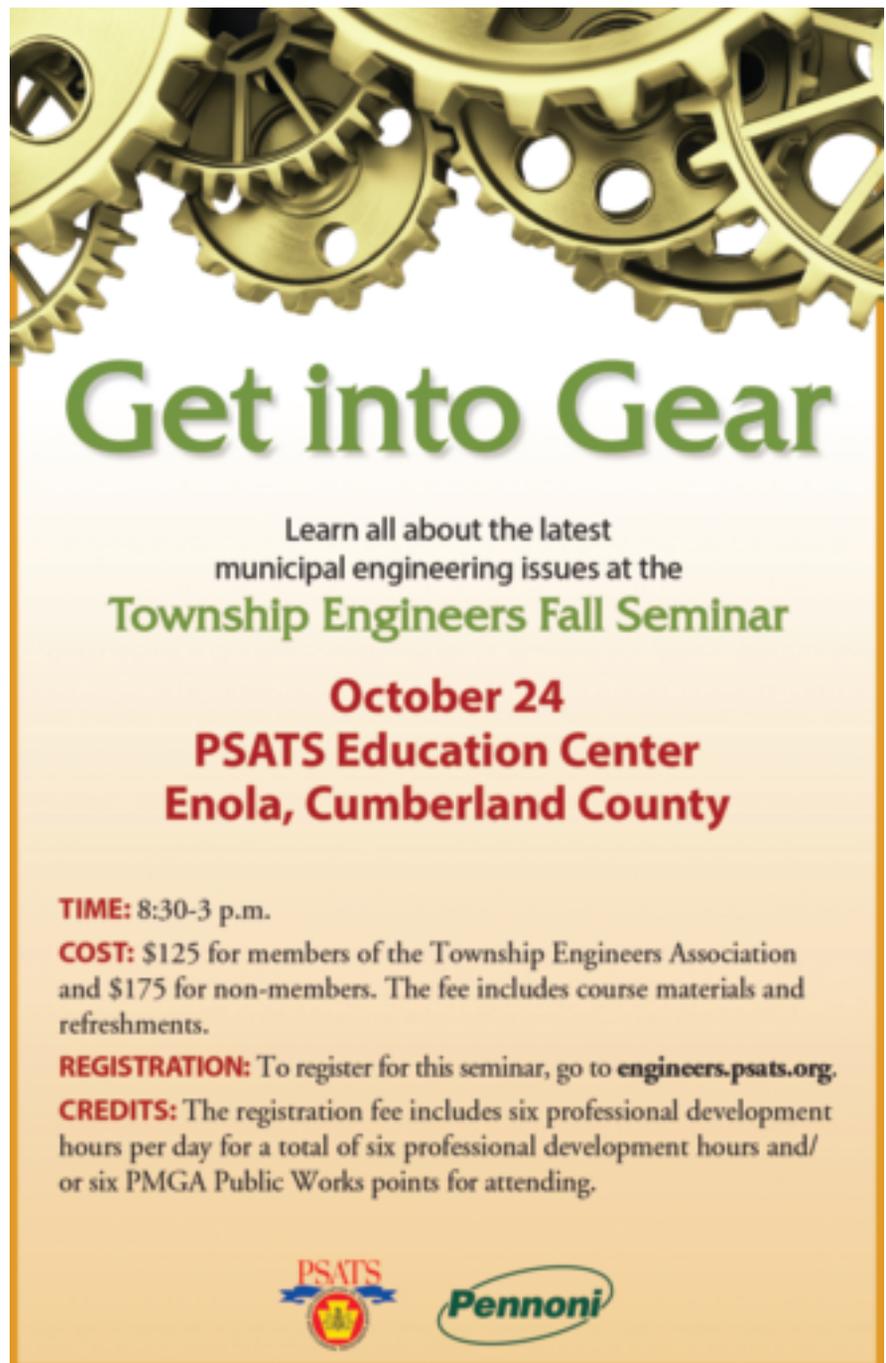
“It’s something I’ve championed in recent months,” she says, “and it’s been exciting to know I’m getting results.”

Making waves like this isn’t her normal mode of operation, Zona says, but she felt this fight was important. Residents had been complaining about

the park’s poorly drained soccer fields, deteriorating road, closed bathrooms, and a general lack of care paid to the property.

Zona’s push to champion a cause should really come as no surprise for someone who takes great pride in her community and strives to make a difference in the township she calls home.

“Marion Township has been a big part of my life,” she says. “I like helping people and solving problems, and I couldn’t have asked for a more rewarding job.” ♦



**Get into Gear**

Learn all about the latest municipal engineering issues at the  
**Township Engineers Fall Seminar**

**October 24**  
**PSATS Education Center**  
**Enola, Cumberland County**

**TIME:** 8:30-3 p.m.  
**COST:** \$125 for members of the Township Engineers Association and \$175 for non-members. The fee includes course materials and refreshments.  
**REGISTRATION:** To register for this seminar, go to [engineers.psats.org](http://engineers.psats.org).  
**CREDITS:** The registration fee includes six professional development hours per day for a total of six professional development hours and/or six PMGA Public Works points for attending.

## How PSATS has helped this Hall of Famer

When something new comes up that Marion Township and its neighboring municipalities are unfamiliar with, Marilyn Zona always knows where to turn for answers.

“I know I have an ally in PSATS,” she says. “We can count on the Association to always be there for us.”