

HALLOFFAME

For more than two decades, **Norma Zeisloft** has gone above and beyond to keep Mill Creek Township in Lycoming County going. She is always willing to do what is necessary to get the job done, the chairman says.

'The glue that holds things together'

Norma Zeisloft
Mill Creek Township,
Lycoming County
24 years of service

BY BRENDA WILT / ASSISTANT EDITOR

Mill Creek Township in Lycoming County is a small, rural municipality of about 600 residents. All of its 19½ miles of road are unpaved, and the township has no full-time employees. It's often a struggle to find people to run the grader to smooth the roads or even to plow snow in the winter. A budget of only about \$200,000 requires stretching every dollar as far as possible.

Mill Creek may not have a lot of the things that larger, more affluent municipalities have, but it does have one thing that keeps it on its feet: long-time secretary Norma Zeisloft.

"Norma does everything that's necessary — and a lot that is not — to keep the township going," chairman Ben Meckbach says. "She's the glue that holds everything together."

And how. The quest for manpower is a constant struggle, Zeisloft says.

"We have a really hard time getting road workers — especially someone who can run a grader or has a CDL — because it's part-time," she says. "They want to go somewhere they can get benefits. One time, I advertised for a grader operator eight times and could not get anyone."



Secretary-treasurer Norma Zeisloft is practically like a fourth supervisor for Mill Creek Township in Lycoming County, the chairman says. For more than two decades, she has kept the township running smoothly, boldly meeting challenges and adapting to change along the way.

Over the years, various supervisors have been able to help with the plowing, either because they had their own business and could take the time or because they worked second shift, she says. Currently, one of the supervisors has a CDL and an employer who allows him to take off to plow the roads.

When the *News* went to press, Zeisloft was busy trying to line up potential plow operators for this winter. There was no hint of panic in her voice, though.

"We always manage to get it done," she says. "I just don't have this year's drivers figured out yet."

Handling people

Zeisloft came to Mill Creek Township in 1970 with her first husband, whose family had roots there. They built a house on a piece of land he inherited and began to raise a family.

Always a community-minded citizen, Zeisloft was active in the local school's PTA, as was the township secretary, who had a daughter the same age as Zeisloft's. The secretary was leaving the position and asked Zeisloft if she was interested in the job.

"I was, so she recommended me to the supervisors and that's how I got appointed the first time," Zeisloft says.

A few years later, her husband's job required a move to Montgomery County so Zeisloft recommended her sister-in-law for the secretary's job, and the supervisors appointed her. Fast forward a few more years: Zeisloft returned with her three children to the house in Mill Creek, which the couple had kept for use when visiting. It wasn't long before she was back in the township secretary's chair, where she has remained since.

The small township doesn't require Zeisloft to work full-time. She does any computer work at the township office but handles paperwork and many phone calls at her home, which sits about five miles from the office.

"The best thing has been that I don't have specific hours or need to be somewhere at a certain time," she says. "I can take the children with me, and

How PSATS has helped this Hall of Famer

sometimes they even take naps at the township building.”

Zeisloft is referring to her grandchildren, ages three and five, whom she babysits four days a week. She has done so for many of her 12 grandchildren.

“One of the little ones I used to watch just joined the Navy,” she says. “It was really hard to see him go. He was able to call me after he graduated from boot camp, and it was really nice to hear from him.”

All her grandchildren, especially the boys, always loved going to the township building with her, Zeisloft says.

The flexible hours have also allowed her to take on other work, including cleaning houses one day a week and working as the township tax collector since 1990. Her varied job experiences have given her insight into dealing with lots of different people.

“As the tax collector, I’ve learned how to handle people,” she says. “If they complain about taxes going up, I complain right along with them because I pay them, too.”

“Norma is more of a receptacle for complaints than we supervisors are,” Meckbach says. “Even down to if a road needs to be cindered or plowed, they call her and she tracks down one of us. Although hers is almost a township manager-level position, she is very humble and willing to do whatever is necessary.”

Learning curve

Serving as township secretary for more than two decades has given Zeisloft a thorough understanding of the township and what needs to be done to keep it running smoothly.

“She’s like having a fourth supervisor,” Meckbach says. “She knows how things have been done before. She’s got more institutional knowledge than just about anyone in the township.

“I didn’t know anything when I became a supervisor,” he adds. “Norma really helped me to get acclimated.”

Over the years, Zeisloft has approached new processes and emerging challenges with her usual can-do attitude, Meckbach says.

“For someone who has been a secretary for more than 20 years, she has adapted well to change,” he says.

Norma Zeisloft appreciates being able to reach out to PSATS for help.

“Whenever I have a question and can’t figure something out, I call PSATS and they help me,” she says.

“I have gone to many training sessions and used to attend every PSATS Conference with the secretary of an adjoining township. When she retired, I started alternating going to the PSATS Conference and the tax collectors’ conference. I bounce back and forth between the two because I don’t want to ask the supervisors to pay for both.”

That includes the influx of the natural gas industry into the area. Although Mill Creek does not have any gas wells, one company uses the township roads to access its well pad in an adjoining township, prompting Mill Creek to post and bond roads for the first time.

“The company has been very good about fixing any roads it tears up,” Zeisloft says.

The company may also convert a steep dirt road to a two-lane paved road if it expands its operations in the area, she says. Currently, property owners along the route cannot use the road when a truck is on it because it is too narrow.

Impact fees from natural gas development have given the township a modest economic boost that has enabled it to repair some of the roads but not enough to pave and then maintain them, Zeisloft says. Long-time residents are fine with that. New ones, not so much.

“More people are moving into the township,” she says. “Those who move from bigger cities complain about the dirt roads and want them to be paved. A lot of the other townships around here have some paved roads, but we just can’t afford it.”

Two severe storms last summer made matters worse. Flooding ripped up many roads after the first storm, and the township’s hasty repairs were undone when the second storm hit about 10 days later.

“We had water where I’ve never seen water before,” Zeisloft says. “People who had never been flooded had water in their basements.”

Both the Pennsylvania and Federal Emergency Management Agencies in-

spected the damage, and the state Department of Transportation helped the township estimate the cost to fix the roads. When the *News* went to press, the township was waiting to hear if it would receive any funds.

“It all comes naturally”

Despite the challenges, Zeisloft says she wouldn’t change anything about her job.

“I’ve learned how to cope with all kinds of things, like the flooding,” she says. “You have to figure out who to call and what to do. It all comes naturally to me now because I’ve done it for so many years.”

It’s the people who have kept Zeisloft doing this job for as long as she has, however.

“I like the people I work with; the supervisors are great,” she says. “I like that I get to know so many different people. In a small township, it’s very nice. When someone calls me about a problem with their road, I know where they live and exactly what they’re talking about.”

Still, the long-time secretary may soon be hanging up a few of the many hats she wears.

“I know this will be my last term as tax collector,” she says (*she has three years left in her term*), “and I may finish as secretary at the same time. My husband will be retiring next August, and we want to travel. That would be hard to do if I’m still in these positions.”

Whenever she decides to step down, her absence will be felt by residents and supervisors alike.

“She has genuine compassion and caring for her community,” Meckbach says. “I don’t want to be a supervisor without her.” ♦