

SECRETARY

HALLOFFAME

Over the last 22 years, **Sandy Wright** has built a solid reputation that extends far beyond the boundaries of Greene Township, Beaver County. She is well-known as a township administrator, a teacher, an author, an innovator, and someone who is passionate about the critical role local government plays in the lives of every township resident.

'Be the change you wish to see'

Sandy Wright

Greene Township,
Beaver County

22 years of service

BY JENNIFER L. FLORER /
ASSISTANT EDITOR

As a young girl, Sandy Wright thought she would grow up to be a teacher, an accountant, or maybe even a veterinarian. "Township secretary-treasurer" did not make the list.

And yet, after 22 years serving the residents of Greene Township, Beaver County, she figures that she ended up exactly where she was meant to be.

"I've gotten to do a lot of teaching, and I do a lot of accounting work. Two out of three ain't bad," Wright quips.

As with many of the best things in life, Wright's entry into township service was a bit of a happy accident. Her husband served on the board of supervisors at the time, and Wright was helping him with a 911 addressing project. Richard Ashcroft, a former township supervisor and then-board chairman, was impressed with her efforts,



Sandy Wright never anticipated a career in township government. However, she says, "After I got started, I thought, 'I want to stay here and be the best township secretary that I can be.'" (Photo courtesy of Wright.)

and when the part-time secretary left for a full-time job, he offered Wright the position.

She said "yes" on two conditions: that she have a permanent office space

(the previous secretary had worked out of her home) and be allowed to take a class in grant writing.

"I hadn't decided what I wanted to do for the rest of my life, so I thought I would just help them set up the office," Wright says. "After I got started, I thought, 'I want to stay here and be the best township secretary that I can be.'"

Wright was the township's first full-time secretary, and Ashcroft says the board could not have made a better choice.

"We felt that the secretary-treasurer is the most valuable person in the township," he says. "They have to provide you with good information so you can make good decisions. Sandy is a take-charge person and does the job above and beyond — more than ever would be expected of her."

A changing role

Five years into her role as secretary-treasurer, the supervisors changed Wright's title to "administrative secretary-treasurer." It meant more responsibility, from handling every aspect of the township office to managing other staff.

The promotion should have been



Sandy Wright has shared her knowledge of what it takes to run a township office as a PSATS course instructor since early in her local government career. Shown standing above, Wright leads the discussion during the Township Secretaries and Managers Q&A session at PSATS' 2012 Annual Educational Conference.

“I love local government. You learn something new every day.”

Living the golden rule

One of Wright's secrets to success may be that she's willing to take on any challenge. The biggest she has faced in 22 years on the job, she says, has come from issues around a coal waste facility in the township.

The local utility that runs the facility now owns 20 percent of the land in the township, Wright says, and she has put countless hours into making sure the township and residents receive adequate compensation in return for the impacts on the community.

“I would never have thought I would have the training or background to tackle these kinds of issues,” Wright says, “but if nobody else is going to do it, I will do it myself.”

The township, she says, is always there to help the residents, and the occasional heart-felt “thank you” makes every day worthwhile. She has been especially grateful for the accolades she has received over the years, from the PSATS Chairman's Distinguished Service Award in 2002 to induction as a distinguished alumna into her school district's Hall of Fame.

Any dedicated secretary does the job not for what she gets out of it, though, but for what she can give.

“I treat people the way I want to be treated,” Wright says. “I believe that you can only be successful if you've got a good support system.” ➤

no surprise, since by that time Wright had become the go-to person for anyone with a township-related question or concern. She had made it her mission to learn everything she could about local government, sought input from other long-time secretaries and managers, and had begun to mentor her peers, too.

At about the same time, the regional planning commission asked for Wright's input on how to best train secretaries in smaller local governments. She advocated for a compilation of important how-to's and checklists to make every secretary's job easier. She also figured she would be acting as a consultant and providing nothing more than a few checklists.

“Instead, it was a lot of research, creating some things that no one else seemed to have, and putting together chapter prefaces as to why it's important

to have certain things in place in your office,” Wright says.

Her name went on the *Municipal Secretary Desktop Reference Manual* as co-author, and then she hit the road to help other municipal secretaries learn how to use the new guide. Wright has also shared her expertise as a training instructor for many other classes over the years, including PSATS workshops.

“Sandy is always there when you have a question,” says Sharon Vinci, secretary-treasurer for Hanover Township in Beaver County. Wright showed Vinci the ropes when she started her job in 2008.

“There's a lot to know — it keeps changing all the time — and she was able to clarify things for me,” Vinci says. “Even if she doesn't have the answer right away, she knows who to contact to find the answer for you.”

“Sandy is a take-charge person and does the job above and beyond — more than ever would be expected of her.”

She is also a big advocate of having a hobby that can take a township secretary's mind off of municipal matters for a few hours a day. For Wright, relaxation means singing with the award-winning Sounds of Pittsburgh Chorus, a chapter of the Sweet Adelines.

"Singing is the only thing that kept me sane sometimes," she laughs. "You need to have an outside interest."

Despite the challenges inherent in township work, Wright knows she found her calling.

"I love local government," she says. "You learn something new every day."

Plus, it's the perfect place to carry out one of her core philosophies: that everyone can make a difference. The feeling is summed up nicely on a sign by her desk.

"Be the change you wish to see in this world," it says. ♦

Do you have an incredible township secretary? Tell us.

Townships certainly have their share of unsung heroes, and township secretaries are among them.

Therefore, to give these hard-working men and women the recognition they deserve, PSATS has introduced a new feature, the Secretary Hall of Fame. Secretaries must have at least 20 years of service to be eligible.

To nominate yourself or your secretary for the honor, contact Associate Editor Brenda Wilt at (717) 763-0930 or bwilt@psats.org. If submitting a written nomination, be sure to include your name, township and county, daytime telephone number, and email address.

what's in a name?

WHAT'S IN A NAME? Well, leave it to the *Township News* to tell you. Periodically, we will explore the origins of township names — and in our search, we've found a lot of stories out there. Some townships have been named after people, others after geographical landmarks. In fact, the names for the state's 1,455 townships of the second class are as varied as the townships themselves, and each has its own unique story.

Union Township, Berks County

A "marrying" of two areas gave Union Township, Berks County, its name. Portions of Robeson Township in Berks County and Coventry Township in Chester County were combined in 1753 to form the new township.

The land for Union Township, like most of Berks County, was purchased in the 18th century through an existing treaty between the local Native Americans and the sons of William Penn. Swedish and German immigrants settled there first in the early 1700s, and by 1759, there were 62 taxable residents. By 2000, the population had grown to about 3,500.

Early settlers relied on the readily available water power for mills. By the early 1800s, mills were located along Six Penny Creek, Hay Creek, Mill Creek, and the Schuylkill River. Hopewell Furnace, located in the southern portion of the township, was prominent in the iron industry and fulfilled a vital role in the American Revolution.

Settlers also farmed the fertile land adjacent to the Schuylkill River and Hay Creek. Large portions of these areas are still used for agriculture today.

The Schuylkill Canal, completed in 1824, played an important role in the township's growth and development. The canal system provided a means to transport coal, iron, lumber, merchandise, and produce between Schuylkill County and Philadelphia. Sections of the abandoned canal, which became obsolete in the 1870s, are still visible in the northern part of the township.

Union Township has a number of historic structures and villages, including:

- Hopewell Furnace, built in 1765 and now a part of the National Park Service;
- Unionville and Monocacy, the oldest hamlets in the township;
- St. Paul's Methodist Episcopal Church, established in 1773 and believed to be the oldest Methodist Church in Berks County and the third oldest in the country;
- St. Paul's Roman Catholic Church, built in the 1840s; and
- St. James Evangelical Lutheran Church, built in 1850.

Source: www.co.berks.pa.us/Muni/Union

How did your township get its name? If you haven't already done so, please drop us a note explaining how your township got its name to: Editor, *Pennsylvania Township News*, 4855 Woodland Drive, Enola, PA 17025; fax (717) 763-9732 or e-mail glinn@psats.org.