

SECRETARY

HALLOFFAME

Sheryl DeBoer has seen a lot of changes come to Brady Township, Clearfield County, over the last 33 years. Although they have all come with challenges, the long-time secretary has met them head on and done her best to accommodate the residents' needs.

On call 24/7

Sheryl DeBoer

Brady Township,
Clearfield County
33 years of service

BY BRENDA WILT / ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Just about any township supervisor will tell you that it's often the secretary who really keeps the township humming. That fact was brought home to the officials of Brady Township in Clearfield County during some recent litigation, supervisor Charlie Muth says. The township's secretary, Sheryl DeBoer, had to testify during the case, and the judge was asking her questions about her qualifications and what she does in her job.

"He concluded that she is basically the 'mother' for the township," Muth recalls. "She definitely makes the supervisors look good. One of the supervisors who left at the end of the year always said that if Sherry retired, he was going to leave, but he ended up leaving first."

Muth cites a litany of reasons that DeBoer is so valuable to the township, from knowing where to get answers to being at the front lines when it comes to residents' complaints.

"She takes a lot of abuse if people



Brady Township supervisors depend on secretary Sheryl DeBoer for many things, from keeping the board organized to budgeting and responding to residents.

aren't happy about something," he says. "I told her she doesn't have to take that; she can send them to the supervisors. The truth is, though, usually she can talk to them and by the time they leave, they are happy."

"I try to be as accommodating as possible," DeBoer says. "If I get a call

from someone who is a little upset, I try to defuse the situation. The supervisors are always there to back me up. That makes it a lot easier to do what I need to do."

Forget working 9 to 5 either, the longtime secretary says. In a small, rural community where everyone knows everyone else, that won't cut it.

"I don't have set hours," she says. "I flit between my house and the township office. Because I've been here so long, people know that if I'm not at the township, I'm at home. I'm kind of on call 24/7."

DeBoer knows that some people just can't get there during regular office hours to pick up permits and take care of other business so she makes herself available at other times. And while most people at least call first, some just show up at her door, she says.

Even when she is not home, she doesn't leave residents in the lurch. Her husband, retired from the phone company, acts as her answering service when she has to run errands.

"He attends the township meetings, so he usually has an idea of what people are talking about when they call," she says.

In with the new

DeBoer has seen a lot of changes

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come to the township over the last three decades. Some of the more recent have been the most challenging, such as using a computer. Although that came with a steep learning curve, DeBoer acknowledges that it has made some tasks easier, such as filing year-end reports.

“The supervisor who wanted to bring in computers said, ‘Your job will be so much easier,’” she says. “It has eliminated a lot of steps in budgeting and accounting, but it also seems to make a lot more paperwork. Some things became easier, but others have become more difficult.”

DeBoer also points to such things as the statewide building code, never-ending federal and state mandates, and legal issues as new challenges that have sprung up during her township career.

“I handle the permits for everything except construction,” she says. “I think there is more permitting going on, and there is more paperwork dealing with pensions. Everything that we get involved in generates more paperwork.”

Muth says DeBoer does a wonderful job meeting new challenges.

“For example, we wanted to start a website,” he says. “Sherry found people to work with to create a site as inexpensively as possible.”

The township is also getting ready to embark on a public sewer system installation. DeBoer is not only setting up the billing system but was also tasked with preparing a budget that would meet the costs of the project.

“The budget will be tight this year because of putting in the system,” Muth says. “We’ll have to borrow a little bit of money. We gave her a list of what we wanted to do, and she came up with a budget that worked.”

When the supervisors had a big discussion about keeping landowners and taxpayers informed about ordinances, permits, and so on, DeBoer collaborated with tax collector Elizabeth Wingert to create a newsletter that is mailed out annually with tax notices.

Working with the tax collector probably comes easily to the longtime secretary. Both her mother and grandmother each served as tax collector for more than 30 years. That gives the three of them, together, more than a century of public service.

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Between a rock and a hard place’

Working for the township has been a great learning experience, DeBoer says. “When I was going to business college, government was the last thing on my mind,” she says. “I’ve had to learn about mandates, federal and state regulations, you name it.

“A lot of the mandated stuff puts the township between a rock and a hard place,” she adds. “Some of these things, like advertising and legal notices, cost the township so much money. Also the prevailing wage; just to put a roof on the building puts us into the prevailing wage. It makes it

difficult to budget.”

Despite the challenges, this mother of three grown children and grandmother to two doesn’t plan to hang up her hat anytime soon.

“The schedule worked when my kids were small and then when my mom lived with us,” she says. “As long as my health holds out and it’s going well, I plan to stay.”

That dedication is exactly why Charlie Muth suggested DeBoer for the Secretary Hall of Fame.

“We really appreciate what she does,” he says. “There should be more ways for municipalities to honor their employees for the work they do.” ♦

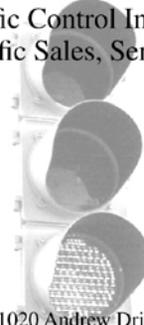


COUNTY ASSOCIATION
Upcoming Conventions

FEBRUARY
February 22: Bucks and Perry Counties
February 28: Montgomery County

PLEASE NOTE: County conventions listed in bold have been confirmed. To learn the location, time, and contact person for each county convention, call PSATS at (717) 763-0930 or visit www.psats.org (choose the “Links” tab and click on “County Associations of Township Officials”). Please be sure to confirm the details with PSATS or the county’s contact person.

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