

‘You have to get involved’

Galen Beachy

Addison Township,

Somerset County

50 years of service

BY JENNIFER L. HAWBAKER / ASSISTANT EDITOR

In 2009, Galen Beachy decided it was time for a change. He was coming up on 50 years as a township supervisor and secretary-treasurer for Addison Township, Somerset County, and thought he was finally ready to hang up his local government hat.

The voters disagreed. They weren't too pleased with the person who had been nominated on both party tickets, Beachy says, so he ran — and won — for both parties as a write-in candidate.

“Anymore, that's quite an accomplishment,” fellow Addison Township supervisor Glenn Diehl says — but just one, it turns out, in a list of many.

Another is keeping tight control of the budget year after year, in good times and bad.

“He's very good at managing the township funds and keeping the township in good financial condition,” Diehl says. “We've had to raise taxes very little.”

That's saying something for one reason in particular: The rural township boasts only about 1,000 residents — until the mercury starts to climb. Then the population climbs, too, as summertime tourists flock to the area to enjoy Youghiogheny River Lake.

And those “city folks” expect to find the same services and amenities on vacation that they left behind at home.

“They always wanted something that we couldn’t afford to give them,” Beachy says.

Knowing when to say “no,” however, has helped keep the township on firm financial ground for decades. Beachy honed his management skills, he says, as a foreman for manufacturing, stone, and coal companies.

“I was always in management and always watching what was going on,” he says. He took what he learned in business and put it to work for the township.

“Every month or so, I’d do some soul searching to see where our expenses were,” Beachy explains. “Every couple of months, I’d go back to the previous year to see where we had stood then and if there were any abnormalities now. Then we would correct them and go from there.”

It’s a method he recommends to every municipality.

“I run the township just like I run my own business at home,” Beachy says. “You watch the paperwork and be very careful about spending.”

With the budget under control, Beachy says the supervisors’ main focus over the years has been caring for its 52 miles of roads and tackling the expected issues, such as snow removal, road construction, and maintenance.

Every once in a while, though, something out of the ordinary comes along — like the time a nudist colony decided the township would be a great place to call “home.”

“They had to meet some ordinance stipulations with fencing,” Diehl recalls with a laugh. “They changed their minds after they found out it would be too expensive to comply.” Otherwise, he says, the biggest worries have been “just your normal floods and snowstorms.”

While he was tackling the day-to-day business of the township, Beachy was also raising a family with his wife. Two of the children still live close by — one right next door — but another set her sights farther from home.

“My youngest married a Frenchman,” he says, “and we’ve been to France four times to visit. We’ve seen more of Europe than we have of the United States!”

Beachy has seen enough of the world, though, to know what makes Pennsylvania’s local government work: the people who devote their time and talents to their community.

That’s why he is quick to give credit to his fellow supervisors for keeping the township running like a well-oiled machine. With Diehl’s 23 years on the board, and supervisor Gary Ohler’s 26 years, teamwork long ago became second nature. Every person knows his job — and does it.

“The main thing with local government,” Beachy says, “is that if you’re going to get into it, you have to really get involved and not sit idly by as a figurehead.”

This is one man who, for 50 years, has spent every day practicing what he preaches.