

HALLOFFAME

For nearly six terms as a supervisor, **Charles Martin Jr.** has helped Aleppo Township in Greene County operate within its means and work toward a fiscally secure future.

The Money Saver

Charles Martin Jr.

Aleppo Township, Greene County
35 years of service

BY BRENDA WILT / ASSISTANT EDITOR

Way down in the southwest corner of Pennsylvania, small, rural Aleppo Township in Greene County is a hot spot for natural gas development. In fact, according to long-time supervisor Charles Martin Jr., there's not much else going on in the municipality.

"We have a lot of natural gas development," he says. "There are lots of well pads and truck traffic, and they are working on putting in a couple more pads. A coal company is starting some work in one corner of the township, but mostly we have a lot of gas pipelines and water lines."

Not that the natural gas boom has been bad for the township, though. "The gas trucks do tear up the roads but, in the end, after they fix them, the roads are 10 times better than when they started," he says. "The impact fee money has really helped townships, especially small ones like ours. There is nothing big here to bring in money."

That's why, over 35 years of service on the board of supervisors, Martin and his fellow supervisors learned to be frugal with the finances for this community of about 500 residents. It's a practice they continue today.



Starting young

As a teenage summer hire at the township during his high school years, Martin was a natural to one day sit on the board of supervisors. In fact, when he was a senior, two of the supervisors convinced him to run for an open seat and even helped him get the signatures on the petition to get on the ballot.

"I ran on both tickets and won the primary," he recalls. "I graduated from high school in May 1981 and was elected in November."

Martin served three terms and then lost his bid for re-election. Four years later, he was urged to run again. He regained a seat on the board and has been there ever since.

Now in his sixth term as a supervisor, **Charles Martin Jr.** has helped Aleppo Township in Greene County upgrade its equipment and facilities by practicing fiscal responsibility. As a working roadmaster, he enjoys operating equipment and building relationships with the public.

Learning to save money

Other than a stint with the gas company during his four years out of office, Martin has been a laborer and now working roadmaster for the township. He has seen much improvement in the municipality's assets over the years.

"When I started, the only equipment we had was a road grader, mower, dump truck, and an old tractor with a front bucket to load stone," he says. "It took a lot of labor back then to replace culverts. We'd dig what we could with the tractor and then we'd get out the shovels and digging irons to do the rest by hand."

The township had no facility to store the equipment or use as an office. Over time, the township's state legislators helped secure grants to build a garage. The supervisors learned to do without and save money where they could.

"The gas companies would give us pipes they removed from the ground, and we would use them for culverts," Martin says. "We applied for grants to get a tarp (*fabric*) building to store salt, and we now have a trailer that we use for an office and meetings."

The township garage houses three dump trucks and a grader, backhoe, boom mower, drop-deck mower, drum roller, high lift for loading stone, and a tractor to pull the road drag for unpaved roads.

“The township has come a long way,” Martin says. “Most of our roads are unpaved unless the gas trucks are traveling them; they have blacktopped them.”

Getting that garage is one of Martin’s proudest accomplishments. “Having a place to work out of and pull the trucks in is great,” he says. “In the winter back when I first started, if it snowed overnight, you had to go in early and shovel out the bed of the truck.

“The other two supervisors would be in the back of the truck hand-shoveling cinders out the back. Now, we have spreaders.”

To cut costs, the township would use sawdust from a local sawmill as antiskid, sometimes mixing it with cinders that an adjoining township gave it.

“Whenever we could save money, we would,” he says. “At different times, we had supervisors with outside jobs who wouldn’t take health insurance, and that helped.”

Talking things out

Natural gas development has probably been the most contentious issue in Aleppo Township, and the supervisors had a straightforward, practical way to address resident concerns.

“We got together the top dogs from the gas company and the residents so everyone was on the same page and could talk things out,” Martin says. “We had to get the residents to understand that things would be better in time. The gas company worked with the residents to get things smoothed out. They are here to stay, and we have to work with them.”

Martin does not demonize the drivers of the big trucks. He recognizes that they are just doing their job and trying to make a living. There was a bit of friction with them at first, though.

“The biggest issue was speed,” he says. “The trucks were going faster than we were used to. The company had their own people deal with it. They also

put up signs prohibiting jake brakes, which helped.”

The township also had issues with trucks driving on roads that were not bonded for them, he says. If the drivers weren’t using dedicated GPS, they were being directed to the wrong roads. Eventually, the gas company printed out the correct route and gave it to the contractors.

Talking things out resolved issues with the natural gas developer, and Martin uses the same technique when dealing with residents.

“Over the years, I’ve heard it all,” he says. “If someone comes here in the morning and rips me up one side and down the other and then I see them later that day, I will try to talk to them. You can’t go away with your tail between your legs. You have to talk it out and take care of it.”

The same holds true for working with the other supervisors.

“We work well together,” Martin says. “Everyone has their differences, but we’re all here for one thing: to take care of the township.”

Hoping for one more term

After nearly six terms as a supervisor, Martin hopes to get at least one more under his belt before thinking about moving on.

“I’m up for re-election this year, and right now, no one has filed against me. If I serve one more term, that would get me to 65 years old. I’m hoping to retire after one more term.”

The divorced father and grandfather still enjoys what he does, though, from talking to residents to working on the roads.

“I like this kind of work and talking with and meeting different people,” he says. “Day to day, you don’t know what you’re going to get into. If a storm comes overnight, you might have to remove trees and debris. I can run every piece of equipment we have.”

When he does finally decide to leave office, perhaps his greatest legacy will be the simple lesson he has learned over decades of responsibly spending taxpayer dollars, and which he expresses best: “If you don’t really need something, don’t buy it.” ♦

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