



TOWNSHIPS TODAY

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER
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YOUR TOWNSHIP

What Can You Do for Your Township?

Communities of all sizes need a helping hand

Whether you live in a township that's large or small, it takes a team to run it.

Township supervisors, managers, secretaries, road crews, police officers, code enforcement officials, and many others work together to ensure your family and home are safe and that you get the answers you need — when you need them.

Of course, on the surface, your community may appear to be a quiet place. Behind the scenes, however, it's a different story. You may not realize it, but each and every day the township is humming with activity as local officials take care of business so they can take care of the township and you.

That means patching potholes and paving roads, plowing snow, solving problems, patrolling streets, and carefully watching tax dollars. And while your township may run like a well-oiled machine, townships of all sizes and budgets can always use more help.

So maybe it's time to ask yourself: What can I do for my township? The answer to that question is simple enough: Get involved.

Despite busy lives, many people have chosen to play a supporting role. ➤



Townships of all sizes and budgets need volunteers. You can serve on an advisory board or opt instead to perform other tasks, such as planting flowers and trees at the local park.

Pennsylvania has millions of volunteers

Last year, in fact, almost 2.7 million Pennsylvanians dedicated 350.2 million hours of their time to volunteer service, according to a 2007 report from the Corporation for National and Community Service, which sponsors such programs as AmeriCorps. While that figure is down slightly over the last two years, it represents an increase of almost 8 percent since 1989.

Not surprisingly, residents 65 or older did the most volunteering, followed by 35- to 64-year-olds. Those 25 to 34 years of age averaged the fewest hours of service but still exceeded the national average by a few percentage points.

As others have found, volunteering in a township can be personally rewarding. Think of it this way: By offering to help, you're choosing to give something back to the community that has given you, your family, and neighbors so much.

It can be an educational experience, too. With an insider's view of your local government, you'll see how township officials tackle issues and reach decisions to serve the best interests of the entire community.

Volunteering also allows you to play a role in shaping your township. That's what prompted John Haiko, a Chester County supervisor and an officer of the Pennsylvania State Association of Township Supervisors, to get involved in his municipality, where he began his public service career on the planning commission.

"At the time, the township was sparsely populated but was beginning to see some development," he says. "If this change was going to happen, I wanted to have an opportunity to help manage it."

Two years later, Haiko was appointed to the board of supervisors, where for the past 17 years, he and his colleagues have been employing innovative land use strategies to encourage growth in the township while maintaining its natural and historic beauty.

Above all else, though, when you donate your time and talents to your township, you're helping it reduce costs. For instance, in Jackson Township, Cambria County, a local business owner saved the community hundreds of dollars over the years by simply fixing its computer problems for free.

Commit a lot or a little

How much time you give is entirely up to you. While you can make a big commitment to

your township by serving on its planning commission, the parks and recreation board, or its environmental advisory committee, if it has one of these, you can opt instead to perform smaller tasks. These include helping with a mailing, planting flowers and trees, installing playground equipment, or taking photos at a township-sponsored event.

To get the volunteer ball rolling, pick up the phone and call your township. Talk to officials about your skills, tell them how much time you have to offer, and ask them about the help they need. Township officials will appreciate your willingness to pitch in and will work with you to find opportunities.

Make time for a meeting

Volunteering is just one way to get involved in your township; attending meetings is another.

Sure, it's important to give something back to the place you've put down roots, but it's equally important to understand the issues, learn about projects the township supervisors are working on, and determine how these things will impact your municipality.

The supervisors meet once a month — sometimes twice — and it's at these public meetings that you will learn the most about your township. You can call the township or log onto its Web site, if it has one, to find out about upcoming meeting dates and times.

Typically, the board meetings last an hour or two and cover a variety of topics, from road maintenance to new developments. Township supervisors set aside time for public comment. Therefore, you can play an active role in grassroots governing by addressing the board face-to-face and helping guide its decisions.

If, however, it's difficult for you to attend a meeting, you can always read about it in the local newspaper, check out a rerun on the local public access channel, or visit the township's Web site. Many communities post meeting minutes on the Web that detail what decisions were made and why.

Getting involved in your township is as simple as devoting a few hours a week, a day or two a month, or several days a year. And if you're still a bit hesitant, remember these wise words: "Do all you can with what you have, in the time you have, in the place you are."

Now, don't you have a phone call to make?

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