



A FIRM FOUNDATION

Families Uphold Township
Officials Through **LEGACY,
LATITUDE, AND LOVING SUPPORT**

BY **BRENDA WILT** / ASSISTANT EDITOR

IF YOU WANT TO KNOW WHAT MAKES township supervisors successful leaders, look no further than their families. Supervisors will be the first to say that they would not be where they are today were it not for the support and cooperation of their spouses, offspring, and extended families. In short, they couldn't do what they do without them.



Bob Wagner, left, and his father, Frank, both serve as supervisors for Dallas Township in Luzerne County. "I'm just like my dad in many ways," the younger Wagner says. (Photo courtesy of Bob Wagner.)



Joe Wise, a supervisor for Moon Township in Allegheny County, followed in his dad's footsteps to become a township official. Today, he relies on support from his wife, Mary Jo, and son, Christian, who at age 9 stumped for his dad at the polls (below). (Photos courtesy of Joe Wise.)



Some say that it takes a village to raise a child. In a similar way, many township supervisors say it takes a family to uphold a public servant. These township leaders say they couldn't do the job without the understanding, counsel, and support of their spouses, children, and extended family.

The family serves as a firm foundation for these elected officials, who depend on the legacy of parents and extended family who served previously, the latitude to devote much of their time to the community, and their family's loving support, from campaigning to cookie baking. Here are their stories.

'Like father, like son'

When talking about a family legacy of township service, you can't find a better example than Bob Wagner. He is serving his first term as supervisor for Dallas Township in Luzerne County alongside his father, Frank, who has been on the township board for more than 50 years.

"I sat around the dinner table and heard conversations about how the township was running and its problems for more than 50 years," the son says.

It seemed only natural, then, that when one of the supervisors was running unopposed last year, Wagner decided to throw his hat in the ring. Not surprisingly, he won the seat. Dad had some basic advice for the newly minted supervisor.

"He explained that a lot of it is common sense," Wagner says. "Just do what is best for the township."

The Wagners are a close-knit family, and the younger supervisor checks in with his parents every day. That's not difficult since he lives just two doors away. The father and son are careful not to violate the Sunshine Law by talking about township issues.

"We know we can't do it, so we just don't," Wagner says.

Although the elder Wagner will probably hang up his hat when his term ends this year, his son may just continue the legacy of long-time service.

"I'm just like my dad in many ways," he says. "We both like to hunt, fish, and cook. Like father, like son, I guess."

'It's not glamorous'

Public service also runs in the family for Joe Wise, a supervisor for Moon Township in Allegheny County. His father served as a supervisor 30 years ago, and Joe's background includes working as a legislative aide to two congressmen and a U.S. senator.

"My family has been very public service-minded for a long time," he says.

The legacy is extending to the next generation as well. When Wise ran for supervisor in 2013, his then-9-year-old son, Christian, accompanied him as he knocked on doors around the township.

"My son follows the campaigns and elections at every level," Wise says. "I'm trying to help him see that it is about service and giving back to the community," he adds. "When I got a road paved in the township, I told him that's what this job is. It's not glamorous."

When Wise worked as a lobbyist in Pittsburgh and had to travel to Harrisburg, he would take his family along when he could. Things haven't changed since he became a supervisor.

"My son really wants to come along to the PSATS Conference," Wise says. "He wants to see how these things work."

Looking back to move forward

Al Cwynar has several supervisors in his family tree, and their example helped him decide to run for a seat in Potter Township, Beaver County, 12 years ago. His grandfather was a supervisor in the 1950s, his mother's brother served in the '70s, and his father's brother served in the late '70s and early '80s.

"When they were on the board, I would listen to the things that were going on," Cwynar says. "When my wife suggested that I run, I thought back to what they did to move the township forward. That's what I wanted to do. I've never had an agenda; I just look at what's good for the township."

The legacy is continuing with the next generation, too. His son works full-time on the township road crew, his daughter-in-law serves on the recreation board, and the entire family likes to help with the township picnic.

Having an uncle who served as a supervisor and roadmaster for 20-some years also helped Jake Meyer when he



Potter Township, Beaver County, supervisor Al Cwynar was inspired by his grandfather and two uncles who were township officials. His wife, Vicki, supports him by baking cookies for every supervisors meeting. (Photo courtesy of Al Cwynar.)



Chuck Stowe, a supervisor for Allegheny Township in Butler County and a member of the PSATS Executive Board, has public service in his bloodline. He often has his wife, Mary, at his side, especially at PSATS' Annual Educational Conference.



Dave Wartzenuft, left, a first-term supervisor for Rockland Township in Berks County, not only got his son, Derick, interested in the junior fire service but also recruited him to be the township emergency management coordinator. (Photo courtesy of Dave Wartzenuft.)



was mulling over running for supervisor of Bethel Township in Berks County three years ago.

“My uncle retired last year at the age of 81,” Meyer says. “He gave me some direction when I was thinking about running and really helped me out.”

Meyer says his children and grandchildren, while not directly involved in the township, serve as a good reminder that there are more generations coming along and that he is working for them.

Relying on experience

For Chuck Stowe, his father’s experience as a township supervisor and secretary inspired him to enter public service. The long-time official for Al-

legheny Township in Butler County, who is also a member of the PSATS Executive Board, got involved in the township just a few years after his father retired as township secretary.

“All three supervisors had resigned,” Stowe says, “so I put in my name but was not appointed.”

At the next municipal election, there were openings for two-, four-, and six-year terms. Stowe decided to run for the two-year term, thinking that if he didn’t like it, it would only be 24 months. That was 39 years ago, and he has been on the board ever since.

Although his father served only one term as supervisor, his counsel was invaluable to his son.

“When a tough decision came up, I could turn to him and ask what his board had done in a similar situation,” Stowe says. “I relied on his experience for guidance.”

The example of public service did not just come from his father, who passed away eight years ago. Two of his

cousins and one son-in-law served as supervisors, and two cousins’ spouses worked as township secretaries.

Stowe’s mother has been the judge of the board of elections for more than 50 years. This past fall was the first time in more than five decades that she did not serve due to her health. In a show of family support, Stowe’s wife, Mary, filled in for her on Election Day.

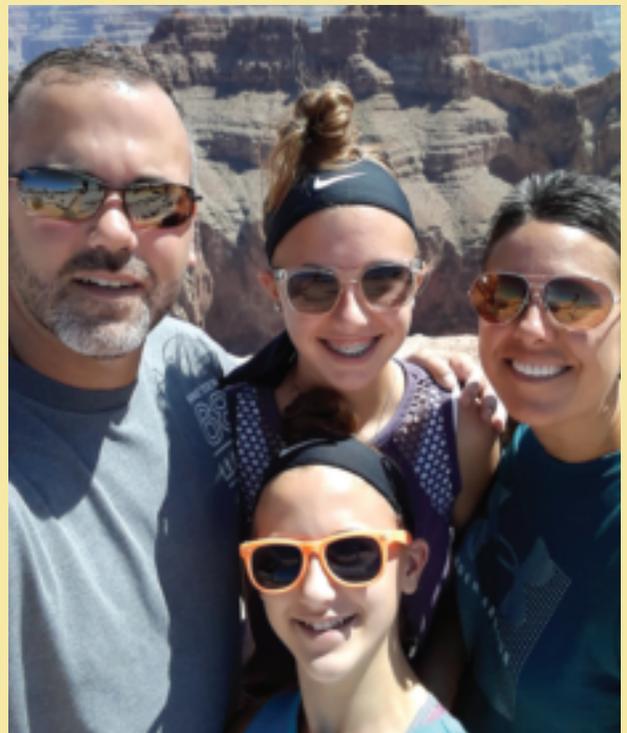
“Mary has always supported me at the township,” he says. “Our anniversary is April 3. When we got married, I jokingly said we could go to the PSATS Convention [as it was called then] for our honeymoon. She said no so we went to the Bahamas. Now, if she had the choice, she would choose the conference.”

Stowe is making sure the family legacy continues with the next generation. A second son-in-law, Len Elder, is a supervisor for Licking Township in Clarion County.

“I encouraged him to get involved,” Stowe says. “They have a farm and



Having an uncle who had served as a township supervisor and roadmaster for more than 20 years helped Jake Meyer decide to seek a seat on the board in Bethel Township, Berks County. He says his wife, Daphne, and their three daughters and four grandchildren serve as a reminder that he’s working for future generations. (Photo courtesy of Jake Meyer.)



Greg Richardson, a supervisor for Southampton Township in Franklin County, and his wife, Tara, have two daughters that are already showing interest in public service. Peyton, 12, and Camryn, 10, love to accompany their parents to the polls on Election Day, and Camryn told her teacher she wants to be a township supervisor when she grows up. (Photo courtesy of Greg Richardson.)

oil and gas development. I thought he would want to be involved in township decisions about those things.”

Like his father before him, Stowe provides counsel when he can.

“Every once in a while, Len will call and talk things through with me,” he says, “just like I did with my father.”

Inspiring the next generation

For some township supervisors, the family legacy of public service is just beginning with them, and they take seriously the responsibility of passing it on to the next generation.

Dave Wartzluft, a first-term supervisor for Rockland Township in Berks County, is encouraging his 18-year-old son’s interest in community service. After more than 20 years of involvement with the volunteer fire department, Wartzluft is passing along that passion to his son, who is a member of the junior fire service.

“He has been around it pretty much all his life,” Wartzluft says. “I was fire chief for a time and am still the assistant fire chief. I’m trying to interest my son in community service and recently got him involved at the township as the emergency management coordinator.”

For Debbie Sargent, serving as a supervisor for Union Township in Washington County is just another way to show her children that community service should be part of life.

“We run a small business in the community, and my family constantly fills in for me in my absence from the shop [due to] township commitments,” she says. “We have raised our children to know that they are not the center of the universe and there are other important matters in life, and our job is to balance them all well.”

Sargent says her children are happy to participate in township events and donate their time to the community. Her daughter, for example, provides free babysitting for a member of the planning commission who would not be able to attend meetings otherwise.

When Sargent ran for supervisor, her children loved campaigning, putting up signs and standing at the polling places, not to mention the parties afterward.

“My older daughter, who is almost 17, has expressed an interest [in public

service] and I encourage her,” Sargent says. “She is excited that she will be old enough to vote in the next election.”

Even young children can be inspired by their parents’ township service. Greg Richardson, a supervisor and roadmaster for Southampton Township in Franklin County, and his wife, Tara, have two daughters, Peyton, 12, and Camryn, 10, who are already looking forward to the day when they can serve.

“Both are always very interested in what I do each day,” Richardson says. “They find my work interesting in both its variety and how it directly affects the daily lives of the people in our community.”

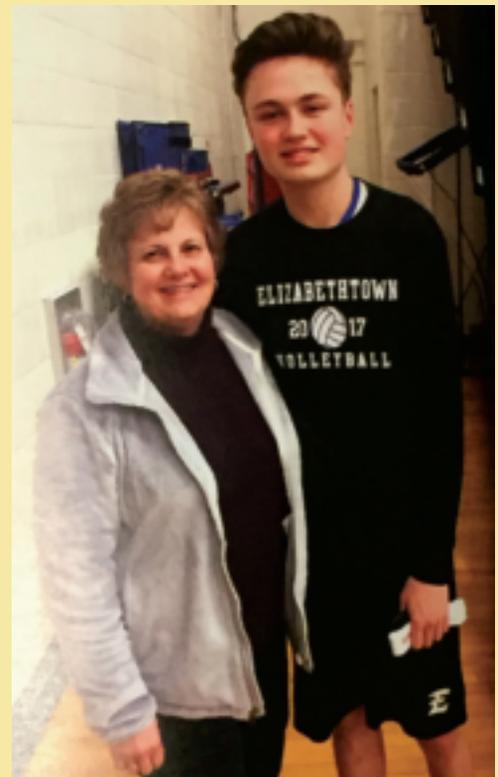
The girls love to accompany him and his wife to the polls on Election Day and proudly wear the “I Voted” sticker afterward. Ten-year-old Camryn enjoys tagging along to help her dad gather signatures to get on the ballot and is already expressing interest in one day becoming a township supervisor.

“Recently, her teacher asked the class what they wanted to be when they grow up,” Richardson says. “She told her teacher she wanted to be a township supervisor. Her teacher, anticipating the standard answer of firefighter, police officer, or teacher, stated, ‘That’s a first.’ Tara and I got a kick out of that one.”

Township vs. family commitments

One of the ways that families support township officials is by giving them the latitude, or freedom, to steal time away from the family to fulfill township obligations. While all supervisors try to balance their obligations, there will inevitably be times when a township commitment will conflict with a family event, whether a special occasion celebration, a child’s sporting event, or a promised activity.

“My family, including my



Lower Paxton Township, Dauphin County, supervisor Robin Lindsey appreciates that her family is so understanding when she has to miss events due to township commitments. Her husband, Joseph (in top photo with Lindsey), is particularly sympathetic because he faces the same challenge as a district magistrate. Lindsey’s grandson Nicholas (at right in bottom photo) also cut her some slack when she had to miss many of his volleyball games over four years because they conflicted with township meetings. (Photos courtesy of Robin Lindsey.)



children and grandchildren, have been understanding of my commitment to the township by showing their support if I have to change a family obligation because of a township event that I need to attend,” Robin Lindsey, a supervisor for Lower Paxton Township in Dauphin County, says. “For the past four years, my grandson Nicholas played on the Elizabethtown boys’ volleyball team, which played on Tuesday and Thursday nights. I have township meetings three or four Tuesdays a month.

“I would always apologize because I could not go on Tuesday night for four years. Nicholas would always say, ‘Nana, it is OK. I understand.’ When he graduated this year, it was on a Tuesday, and I was not missing his graduation. I was

there for him for all the times he understood my missing his matches.”

Lee Irwin, a supervisor for London Grove Township in Chester County, appreciates his wife’s willingness to tag-team attendance at their two sons’ sporting events to allow him to fulfill his township obligations.

“We both take pride in never missing a game,” he says. “Unfortunately, that can happen when there is a township meeting or hearing that I need to attend. Knowing that at least one of us is in the stands cheering them on makes a huge difference to our boys.”

Donna Louder, a council member for home-rule Lower Saucon Township in Northampton County, is also grateful for that kind of latitude from her family.

“The demand on my time has taken away the private time with my husband,” she says. “To remedy this, he has selflessly attended meetings and social events when his schedule permits to support me. My family has also considerately decided to take the time to check my schedule before planning a family event so I am able to attend.” ➤



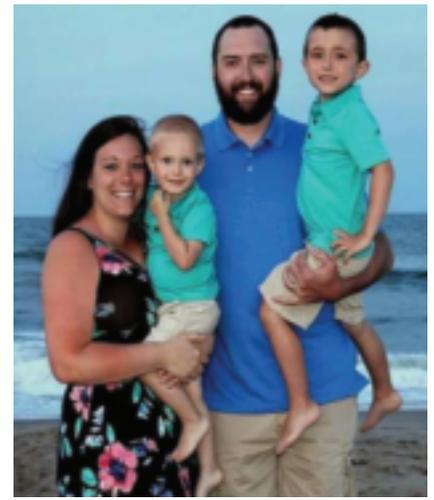
Attending their sons’ sporting events is a priority for Lee Irwin, a supervisor for London Grove Township in Chester County, far right, and his wife, Nicole, far left. The two take a tag-team approach to make sure at least one of them is at every game. (Photo courtesy of Lee Irwin.)



FAMILY SUPPORT



Council vice president John Gillespie of Concord Township in Delaware County preserves time with his family when in public by asking residents to call him if they want to have a lengthy conversation. (Photo courtesy of John Gillespie.)



ABOVE: When residents approach him in public places, Roulette Township, Potter County, supervisor Jeremy Morey says his wife and children simply take it in stride. (Photo courtesy of Jeremy Morey.)

LEFT: John Groh, a supervisor for Millcreek Township in Erie County, goes one way and his wife in another when shopping so that residents who want to speak with him don't delay them both. (Photo courtesy of John Groh.)

Having a wife and son who unselfishly accept the demands on his time has enabled Moon Township's Joe Wise to follow his passion for public service.

"They are both incredibly patient," he says. "I serve on the board of supervisors and am also a member of the Moon Area Transportation Authority. We've been working on a multi-million-dollar intersection project that has required a lot of meetings. I'm also on the comprehensive plan committee for the township, which meets often as we work to implement the plan.

"They have never complained," he adds, "because they know that this is who I am."

'It's part of the job'

Perhaps one of the most unavoidable ways that local officials "steal" time from their families is when residents approach them at the supermarket, gas station, ballfield, or even church to bend their ear about a township issue. Supervisors overwhelmingly say that

their spouses understand that this is part of the job, although their response to the interruptions runs the gamut.

"Rebecca [Matsco, chair of the board of supervisors] says 'You're our ambassador,'" Potter Township's Al Cwynar says. "I can't take a walk without someone wanting to ask a question or voice a concern. My wife jumps right in and offers her thoughts. She's my right-hand woman."

Residents choosing to speak with their supervisors when they see them out and about is something their families must get used to, Roulette Township, Potter County, supervisor Jeremy Morey says.

"My family is very supportive and understanding that sometimes people will approach me and take me away from them for a few minutes," he says. "Usually, my kids ask who I was talking to and that is it. My wife doesn't get angry and understands that it comes with the territory."

John Groh and his wife have changed

their shopping pattern to address this issue. The supervisor for Millcreek Township in Erie County says that he doesn't walk around with his wife when grocery shopping because of residents approaching him and wanting to talk.

"We usually go our separate ways in the store," he says. "I pick up what I need, and she does the rest. Then I go to the checkout area where they have benches to wait for her. I typically will have someone approach me, usually about a minor matter, so I will talk with them."

Supervisors who are not open to being approached should think twice about public service, he says.

"One thing is for sure: I am not afraid to be in the public," he adds. "Elected office shouldn't make you hide from the public. It's part of the job. If you are afraid, don't seek office."

Bethel Township's Jake Meyer has a double reason for residents wanting to speak with him when he's out in the community. Not only is he a supervisor, but he is also a pastor.

"Elected office shouldn't make you hide from the public. It's part of the job. If you are afraid, don't seek office."

“When I am approached by residents, my wife, Daphne, stays out of the conversation unless there is a point that she feels I am neglecting,” he says.

The supervisor/pastor’s approachability has changed a lot of attitudes in the township, he says.

“When I was first elected, the perception was that supervisors don’t listen and just do what they please,” he says. “In the last few months, when people have stopped to talk to me, they have commented that the current supervisors are different — they listen.”

John Gillespie, a council member for home-rule Concord Township in Delaware County, has found a way to be approachable but still preserve his time with his family.

“People will approach me in public, but it’s usually not a long conversation,” he says. “If we go to the grocery store and people ask me about a project or something, I try to keep it brief. If they want to discuss it more, I ask them to give me a call at another time.”

Unlike many local officials, Gillespie says he sees his wife more now than he did before becoming a public servant.

“I retired from a position as a municipal engineer for 17 municipalities before I was elected supervisor,” he says. “I used to be out probably three nights a week at various townships, sometimes quite late. Now I am out just Tuesday night each week and am usually home by 9.”

Sharing ideas and insight

The loving support that township supervisors receive from their families takes many forms. For Dave Buchewicz, a supervisor for South Park Township in Allegheny County, it comes in the form of questions and suggestions, one of which prompted him to seek a seat on the board of supervisors.

“Years ago, I was the real estate tax collector for the township and my wife, Joan, worked in the office,” Buchewicz recalls. “There are 300 parcels of land called ‘bingo lots’ that were awarded to folks from Pittsburgh so they would come to South Park and work in the mines in the 1920s. The lots were on the delinquent rolls, and Joan constantly asked, ‘What can we do about the delinquent Bingo Lots?’ Owners

Dave Buchewicz, a supervisor for South Park Township in Allegheny County, credits his wife, Joan, with prompting him to get some delinquent parcels back on the tax rolls and get local roads adopted for litter cleanup. (Photo courtesy of Dave Buchewicz.)

could not be found, and the few heirs that were contacted wanted nothing to do with the small 25-by-105-foot lots.

“I decided to run for township supervisor with the goal of getting the lots back on the tax rolls as a single parcel,” he continues.

Working with the Allegheny County Redevelopment Authority, he and his wife were able to accomplish their mission of having 300 lots combined into one parcel for development.

Buchewicz says that his wife’s urging for him to do something about roadside litter in the township prompted him to initiate a road adoption program. He reached his goal of having all the main roads adopted, and the township has hired a part-time employee to clean up litter. ➤





“Because of my wife’s prompting, in the past 12 months, we have cleared about 600 bags of litter from our roadsides,” he says.

Sometimes, having a spouse who is also a public servant offers the best kind of support. Lower Paxton Township’s Robin Lindsey has relied on the counsel of her husband, Joseph, as a fellow elected official.

Lindsey says that when she was invited to run for supervisor, she sat down with her husband to weigh the pros and cons, especially since he is a magisterial district judge in the township.

“My husband and I are the first husband-and-wife team to be elected

officials at the same time in our township,” she says. “He is very supportive of me and attends every event with me. Sometimes I need to sound off when I come home from a meeting, and he is there to support me all the way.

“When we are out in the community, we are often asked questions about the township,” she adds. “We each respect the other when talking to residents.”

Campaigns and cookies

Having a spouse who acts as a sounding board is another valuable form of support, supervisors say.

“I often talk to my wife about what is happening at the township and the issues we are having,” Roulette Township’s Morey says. “We discuss what I think we should do, as well as what she feels the township should do for the residents. It is great to be able to bounce my thoughts and ideas off of her when I am thinking about an upcoming meeting or an issue that has arisen.”

Concord Township’s Gillespie says he speaks to his wife about township issues nearly every day.

“She will give me her opinion; she’s very helpful in that way,” he says. “It’s always a good conversation.”

Moon Township’s Joe Wise says that both his wife and son provide feedback.

“I talk to my wife about township issues and ask for her opinion, and I also ask my son what he thinks about certain situations,” he says. “They are plugged into the community through work and social media, my son’s involvement in the Scouts, and so on.”

Of course, at no time is support more valued than when deciding to run for office and then campaigning. Lower Saucon Township’s Donna Louder says that when she decided to run for a seat on the township council in 2015, she had a support system that included family, friends, and neighbors.

“My husband, Tom, was my strength,” she says. “He backed me emotionally by listening to my thoughts and strategies, always giving me his honest opinion, proofreading papers, and keeping me emotionally grounded.

“My parents, who are in their late 70s, supported me during the campaigning stage, working the polls and

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Dates/Locations

Session 1:

- February 5 — Butler Co.
- February 12 — Cumberland Co.
- February 13 — Montgomery Co.

Session 2:

- March 13 — Washington Co.
- March 22 — Bucks Co.
- April 14 — Dauphin Co.

Session 3:

- May 6 — Allegheny Co.
- May 9 — Luzerne Co.
- June 4 — Lancaster Co.

Session 4:

- July 10 — Mercer Co.
- July 17 — Chester Co.
- August 1 — Cumberland Co.

Session 5:

- September 5 — Butler Co.
- September 18 — Monroe Co.
- October 2 — Tioga Co.

Session 6:

- November 7 — Erie Co.
- November 14 — Berks/Lehigh Co.
- December 10 — Cumberland Co.



PSATS' Leadership Development Series





“I often talk to my wife about ... the township and the issues we are having.”

assisting me with flyers on doorsteps,” she says. “My sisters listened, gave feedback, and sometimes offered a new approach to a sensitive situation.”

Louder says her in-laws also traveled two hours one way to work the polls for 10 hours and then turned around and drove home. Neighbors also willingly worked the polls on her behalf on Election Day.

“I am in the third year of my term, and the support has not changed,” she says. “Tom still caringly listens, giving me positive feedback and keeping me grounded.”

Wise’s wife and son were on board with his decision to run for supervisor from the get-go, he says.

“I sat down with them and told them

what I wanted to do,” he says. “Their attitude was, ‘How can I help?’ My term is up this year, and they are both encouraging me to run again.”

When Bob Wagner ran for supervisor in Dallas Township, both of his brothers helped him campaign.

“My younger brother, Barry, was basically my secretary,” he says. “He is more familiar with computers so he handled publicity and things like that. I couldn’t have done it without them.”

Perhaps the most creative form of family support happens in Beaver County, where Al Cwynar’s wife, Vicki, has been baking cookies for the monthly supervisors meetings since her husband took office in 2008. Her contribution is about more than just sweets, however.

“I attended township meetings for a couple of years before running for supervisor,” Cwynar says. “At that time, there was a lot of tension and bad feelings at the meetings.”

After winning a seat on the board,

the newly minted supervisor sat down with his wife to consider ways he could get people to loosen up and get along better.

“My wife likes to bake, and she suggested baking cookies that people could have with coffee before and after the meetings,” Cwynar says.

At first, people were a little suspicious of the cookies, but after a few meetings, everyone started to enjoy them. What’s more, sharing coffee and cookies started to make everyone less tense, and some even lingered after the meetings to talk.

Eventually, Cwynar’s wife started making three kinds of cookies for each meeting, including seasonal varieties for holidays and other occasions. People bring containers to take home the leftovers, and at least one resident told Cwynar he comes to the meetings for the cookies.

“My wife has been doing it for 12 years,” Cwynar says. “She felt she could do something for the township, and now it’s a tradition. I think she enjoys picking out the cookies she’s going to make each month.”

It was Cwynar’s wife who got him involved in the first place.

“She was the one who suggested that I run for supervisor,” he says. “She told me, ‘You’re always saying that if more people would be involved ... Why don’t you run?’”

“After meetings, we’ll take a walk, and I’ll tell her what happened, and she’ll tell me what she thinks,” he adds. “It helps me to think things through.”

* * *

Whether it’s hailing from a public service-minded clan, being given the freedom to devote time to local government, or receiving support through campaigning or cookie baking, the benefits of family support to elected officials cannot be overstated.

“To me, it’s a valuable asset to have a good, solid family foundation,” Bethel Township supervisor and pastor Jake Meyer says. “It makes the job more meaningful knowing that I’m doing this for my children and grandchildren. I’m not only working for the township. I’m working for them as well.” ♦