**Lending a Helping Hand**

**An Op-Ed**

**by David M. Sanko**

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***Note:*** *This op-ed is in recognition of Pennsylvania Local Government Week, April 10-14.*

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

Township supervisors, managers, secretaries, road crews, first responders, 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. What you may not realize, however, is that each and every day, the township is humming with activity as local officials take care of business so they can take care of your community and you.

That means passing ordinances, patching potholes and paving roads, plowing snow, solving problems, and always carefully watching tax dollars.

While you may not know ALL of these hard-working, dedicated public servants personally, they have one goal in mind: to build a better community for you, your family, and your neighbors.

So as Pennsylvania celebrates Local Government Week, April 10-14, this is a golden opportunity to thank them for their service and to ask a critical question: What can I do for my township?

The answer to that question is simple: Pitch in and lend a helping hand!

Despite their busy lives, some people have already made that choice.

**Reaping the rewards**

As these folks 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 “up-close” view of your local government, you’ll see how township officials tackle issues and reach decisions to serve the best interests of the whole community.

Volunteering also allows you to play a role in shaping your community. Above all else, though, when you donate your time and talents to your township, you’re helping to reduce costs and keep taxes low. For instance, one local business owner has saved his township hundreds of dollars over the years by simply fixing its computer problems for free.

How much time you give is entirely up to you. You can make a big commitment to your township by serving on its planning commission, the parks and recreation board, or becoming a first responder, or you can perform other tasks, such as helping out with a mailing, planting flowers and trees, installing playground equipment, writing articles for the newsletter, taking photos at a township-sponsored event, or even doing some filing.

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

Together, you can all make your community a great place to live, work, and raise a family.

**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 local issues, learn about projects the township supervisors are working on, and determine how these things will impact your community.

The supervisors meet once a month – sometimes twice – and it’s at these get-togethers that you will learn the most about your township. You can call your township or maybe even go to its website to find out about upcoming meeting dates, times, and community happenings.

Board meetings cover a variety of topics, from spending to road maintenance to public safety. Keep in mind, too, that the law requires the township supervisors to set aside time for public comment so you will have an opportunity to address the board face-to-face, if you desire.

Getting involved in your township is as simple as devoting a few hours a week, a few hours a month, or a few hours 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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***About the author:*** David M. Sanko is the executive director of the Pennsylvania State Association of Township Supervisors. With a broad background in local and state government, Sanko oversees an organization that is the primary advocate for the commonwealth’s 1,453 townships of the second class, which are home to 5.5 million Pennsylvanians and cover 95 percent of the commonwealth’s land mass.