TOWNSHIPS
IN THE NEWS
Interesting Stories about Member Townships

Townships Continue to Offer Comfort During the COVID-19 Crisis

Since the pandemic hit, townships across the state have found many unique ways to help residents and bring hope to their communities during a time of uncertainty. Following are some examples of how townships continue to respond to the situation with kindness and creativity.

If your township has been doing positive things for your residents during the COVID-19 crisis, please share them with PSATS by emailing Editor Ginni Linn at glinn@psats.org. You can also post photos on our Facebook page at **facebook.com/psats.**

Feeding the community, honoring their veterans

For Memorial Day this year, **Upper Mt. Bethel Township in Northampton County** did not let the COVID-19 shutdown get in the way of honoring veterans and those who have died in service of their country.

To mark the patriotic holiday, the township decided to hold a "still parade" in which residents could drive through the parking lot at the municipal building, where vehicles and equipment from the township road crew, three fire departments, the State Police, and local farmers were set up. The Legion provided a color guard, and the VFW supplied a rifle brigade.

"We had a State Police trooper who rendered a salute to any veteran who was in a vehicle, and the fire trucks blew their sirens as a sendoff," manager Ed Nelson says.

Each veteran was also handed a flag, and everyone who came was provided a Memorial Day poppy in addition to a bagged meal of hot dogs, chips, and a bottle of water. People were required to stay in their cars, and all participants maintained the required social distancing.

"The cars that came through were waving and blowing horns, and some blew bubbles," he says. "Others had signs thanking us and displaying their family veterans."

The distribution of the picnic food was part of what has been a township-wide effort to feed members of the community in the months since COVID-19 hit. A local caterer whose business had been affected by the state shutdown had first approached the township about the idea of providing meals to those in need.

"We have a large percentage of seniors and low-income residents so we

For the Memorial Day drive-by parade in Upper Mt. Bethel Township, the participating fire departments hung a 75-foot flag between two ladder trucks for folks to drive under. Residents made homemade signs to thank first responders. *(Photos courtesy of the township.)*

South Heidelberg Township in Berks County hosted a number of events for residents, including (clockwise from upper left) Light the Night events, a food drive, and an Easter parade. *(Photos courtesy of the township.)*

knew people might be in trouble," Nelson says.

The township and caterer worked with the local food pantry, area merchants, and residents to obtain donated food, and as word spread, the initiative grew to become a real community effort. Volunteers now feed residents throughout the seven municipalities that make up the Bangor Area School District. The hearty meals, which range from roast beef, chicken, and meatloaf dinners to spaghetti and meatballs and baked ziti, are prepared by the caterer and volunteers and packaged in disposable containers for pickup either once or twice a week.

"Everything comes from donations," Nelson says. "No taxpayer money is spent."

Through the end of May, he figures the meal distribution effort had fed more than 3,500 people, including 500 who came through on Memorial Day to pick up their picnic meal.

The drive-by parade served as the culmination of a larger effort to show good will and compassion for others. Not only were essential meals distributed to community members, but the township found a way to honor its veterans while still socially isolating and, in the process, treat everyone to a

patriotic diversion from the grim news surrounding the pandemic. ✦

Going above and beyond to show they care

South Heidelberg Township in Berks County has always prided itself on being a caring community, but during the difficult COVID-19 crisis, it has stepped up in an even bigger way to show kindness and support to its residents.

In the midst of the stay-at-home order, the township organized a series of evening events called "Light Up the Night" in which township employees and supervisors headed out in a pickup truck, decked out in lights and decorations and blaring music, to bring good will and cheer to the community.

"If we can put some smiles on people's faces, play some great music, and get them out of their homes for a little bit to forget what's going on, that's really at the heart of what this event is about," manager Sean McKee told WFMZ-TV in the Lehigh Valley.

The township was looking for a way to connect with people and get them outside their homes on a nice evening. As the truck drove through the streets of the community, the recreation coordinator sat in the bed and played DJ

while recreation board members and township supervisors waved and greeted residents. Young and old came onto their porches and in their driveways to dance, wave, and shine flashlights, glow sticks, and sparklers.

"Hopefully, they feel less isolated and more part of something, especially during this difficult time," McKee says.

In addition to the "Light Up the Night" event, township staff, elected officials, and emergency responders found other ways to show care and kindness to residents, including the following:

• When the township had to cancel its annual egg hunt, it organized an Easter caravan instead. Decorated public works vehicles, fire trucks, and police cars snaked more than 80 miles throughout the township to parade past residents' homes.

Special guests on the back of the trucks included the recreation coordinator, the public works manager dressed as the Easter bunny, and a township supervisor decked out in a lion mascot costume. Residents who had been cooped up for weeks showed their enthusiasm for the visit by posting chalk-drawn messages on their driveways, holding homemade signs, and waving flags and stuffed bunnies.

• The township organized a food drive with Helping Harvest, a food bank serving Berks and Schuylkill counties. Generous residents in the township and neighboring municipalities rose to the occasion by donating more than 2,500 pounds of nonperishable food, far surpassing the event's 500-pound goal.

• The township's emergency responders also found unique ways to reach out to residents who were isolating at home. The police and fire departments organized drive-bys for kids' birthdays, and the police chief delivered BBQ chicken and pizza to staff and seniors at a retirement and assistive-care community.

• After schools shut down as part of the state's stay-at-home order, the township police chief missed seeing the schoolkids that he and his officers would greet each morning at Conrad Weiser East Elementary School. He arranged with the faculty to do a book reading by video so the children could

see him and listen while he read *Pete the Cat Construction Destruction.*

From police and fire personnel to public works and recreation employees to elected officials, everyone found a unique way to spread good will and cheer. Through their many selfless and caring deeds, South Heidelberg Township truly showed what it means to be "public servants" for their community. ✦

No spilled milk here

When COVID-19 disrupted supply chains and farmers had trouble getting their fresh produce to market, some dairy farmers were forced to dump their milk. Instead of crying over spilled milk, **Saville Township in Perry County** decided to do something to try to prevent it.

The township purchased 125 gallons of whole milk and 125 half-gallons of chocolate milk from a local dairy processor and held an event at the firehouse to give it away to residents.

"Considering the current circumstances and times we're in, there are going to be residents who've fallen on hard times," Greg Fuller, the chair of the board of supervisors, told the Perry County Times.

The event didn't cost a lot of money, and the township saw the good-will effort as well worth it.

"We're always looking for small things like that to help the township," he says. ✦

Being neighborly

Neighbors helping neighbors can get communities through tough times. Four neighboring townships in **Lehigh County** decided that this especially held true during the COVID-19 crisis when they adopted motions of intergovernmental cooperation.

"We made an informal agreement,"

Upper Macungie Township Manager Bob Ibach told the Allentown *Morning Call.* "Let's help each other out."

His board of supervisors, along with the governing bodies of **North Whitehall, South Whitehall, and Lower Macungie** townships, approved motions that simply state that in times of emergencies or shortages, where the situation is mutually beneficial, the townships' public works departments can help each other by providing vehicles, manpower, and equipment. The motion is not tied to a specific timeframe and can be invoked or ignored as each township desires.

"If we're friends and we want to play nice, we can," Ibach says. "If we want to be neighbors with a good fence, we can."

While the motion is not legally binding in any way, it sets the stage to provide reassurance during a pandemic or anytime that the townships are willing to help one another. Isn't it nice to know you can count on your neighbor in times of need? ✦

Share your COVID stories with PSATS

WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

Township officials are among those who have been on the front lines of the COVID-19 response. Please share your stories and photos with PSATS of how your township has stepped up during the crisis. We've included some examples in the past few issues, but we know there are lots more where those came from.

Maybe you started using a new method to communicate with residents during the pandemic, helped neighbors in need, or adopted an inventive approach to holding public meetings.

Tell us about it by emailing your stories and photos to Mandy Galletta at mgalletta@psats.org.