



From Your Executive Director

By Bryan E. Smith

TOI Executive Director

Sometimes different is a very good thing!

TOWNSHIP GOVERNMENT is a different breed. It's not as high profile or as political as other forms of government.

Most township officials are just average folks who want to have a leadership role in their community and make a difference. And most of the services we provide aren't headline grabbers—just fundamental services like road maintenance and human service programs that help improve the quality of life, one person at a time.

We like to think that this is a good thing. But there is a down side.

Township government is so low profile, many people don't know who we are and most importantly, what we can do for them.

That's bad for two reasons: One is that township government is like any other form of government in that it works best when people get involved. Your opinion and your vote are important, so it's critical that people be informed.

The second reason is that townships provide a lot of services that can help people if they know about them.

Townships have mandated functions, but may provide a number of additional services.

You already know that every township in the state of Illinois is mandated to provide:

- Road and bridge maintenance
- Property assessment
- General Assistance

One of the reasons townships are so effective is that they can respond directly to a community need. Where larger units of government might have to go through paperwork and delays, township government is better equipped to respond immediately—and a lot more efficiently.

However, townships often do a lot more than that. Again, because townships are close to the community, most have taken steps to pinpoint needs within their communities and design creative programs to help fill those needs. These "optional" services run the gamut, and include everything from shoveling the sidewalk of a

person with a disability, to running hospitals and recreation centers.

Many townships offer special services for youth and seniors. Other programs and services include libraries, water and sewage systems, cemeteries, fire and ambulance services, immunization and other low-cost health care programs and voter registration.

Townships are known for delivering these services inexpensively. We have limited budgets, so these "optional" services often have to pay for themselves, or be administered with the help of volunteer efforts or grant funds. And this has led to some really great partnerships.

What confuses many people is where townships fall in relation to city, county and state government.

Townships are not subsets of cities or counties, but individual geographical designations. So a large city may contain several townships. At the same time, one township may include several small towns. Townships also may cover many rural, unincorporated areas. This is important because certain services in these areas may not fall under any other government. And even if they do, townships are often able to deliver those services more effectively, at a lower cost, and with less red tape.

One of the nice things about township government is that there is a human element. Many of the programs and services we provide are "people programs" that address quality of life issues and have a direct impact on our communities.

If you have "people programs" that you'd like to tell us about, please contact me at bryan@toi.org.

Personally, I am very happy to say that we ARE a different breed of local government. Thank you for your commitment to making sure we stay that way!

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