



from your Executive Director

By Bryan E. Smith

TOI Executive Director

WITH THE 2016 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION campaign still fresh in the minds of many of us, I recently reflected on a term I heard during the 2016 campaign season. I heard, where there were talks about the candidate meeting with the public, the phrase “town meeting” as “the” way to meet with the public, reach out to them and hear their ideas. Is this town meeting concept something new? Absolutely not!

Candidates for public office from president to members of congress, to members of the General Assembly have in more recent years used the town meeting as “the” way to meet with the public.

The State of Illinois was admitted to the union in 1818. When settlers started coming into Illinois from the New England states, they brought with them the idea of the township as their form of local government. Because of this, the Illinois Constitution of 1848 provided for the option of the voters in each county to adopt the township form of government.

I like to refer to the Illinois Constitution of 1848 as the “birth” of township government here in Illinois. In 1848, there were only 99 of the current 102 counties in existence and in 1849, the first year counties had the opportunity to vote on adopting the township form of government, 24 counties adopted it. Today, 85 of Illinois’ 102 counties operate under the township government system, with 1,431 townships (1,428 after May 15, due to consolidation).

In 1850, most of the townships that we know today probably held what would be considered their first Annual Town Meeting. Ever since that date, 167 years ago, every township in the state during the month of April, has held its Annual Town Meeting.

When I get asked about the Annual Town Meeting, I always think back to its true meaning. Remember, we live in a democracy, right?

Well, sort of. Most of our governments are representative/democratic. We elect our legislators, for

example, to represent our interests in Springfield. With townships, we have the luxury of being a representative government AND as close to a pure democracy in the United States. Every voter/elector who attends the Annual Town Meeting has one vote in all matters voted upon. This is one reason I always enjoy attending my township’s annual meeting because you sure don’t find this in other any other government!

When I hear folks say the Annual Town Meeting is outdated, they overlook the fact that true democracy is exercised by the residents of each township. With candidates and other elected officials using the town meeting concept as the way to reach out and hear the people, the town meeting is surely still the best way to hear what the people want and need.

This April, at your Annual Town Meeting, take time to listen and hear what your residents want and need. The Annual Town Meeting is the one time a year that residents have a direct say in how their government is run. The Annual Town meeting is still the “foundation” of township government.

Good luck at the election on April 4th and then at your Annual Town Meeting on April 11th!

Tire Chains

1-800-435-3450



**Galva Iron
& Metal Co.**