



from your Executive Director

By Bryan E. Smith

TOI Executive Director

Annual Meeting Time!

THE MONTH OF MARCH is Busy, Busy, Busy! Township officials are busy preparing budgets, year-end reports and soon townships boards, if they haven't already, will be approving the Agenda for the April 10th Annual Town Meeting. Once the notice is published/posted, the stage is set for the big event.

Every year since 1850, the electors of each Illinois township have gathered on the second Tuesday in April for their annual town meeting to discuss, debate and decide the future course of their respective township for the next year. The annual town meeting is the one time each year when every township resident (elector) present at the meeting has a voice in all matters discussed, or a vote in any matter voted upon. The Declaration of Independence states that "government should derive its just powers from the consent of the governed". This statement is actually demonstrated every year at the annual town meeting. It is TRUE DEMOCRACY in action.

At the annual town meeting, all the officials, except for the town clerk, have no formal role and simply become "electors" just like everyone else attending the meeting. Each elector has one vote and a voice in each matter. What other level of government meets on an annual basis and allows each elector (resident) to officially speak his/her mind and actually vote on each issue voted on?

Those who complain that the annual town meeting is archaic need to take a look at how the "town meeting concept" has been seized upon by elected officials (and candidates for office) at all levels of government, as THE way to reach out to the people and hear what they have on their minds.

The annual town meeting is a wonderful opportunity to promote citizen input and "showcase" your township. It is the perfect time when you can show off the services and/or programs you provide, educate your constituents about township government and hear the thoughts, concerns, and ideas of the electors.

Depending on what action is to be taken at your annual town meeting will probably determine the attendance you have. Why not promote attendance by recognizing residents who have made special contributions or efforts on behalf of the township during the past year? Why not invite the volunteer fire department to make a

report? Whatever you do to encourage attendance and participation will allow you to get your township's story told.

Like any other form of government, townships are the most effective when the people they serve are informed and involved. This is especially true of township government because it is uniquely designed to operate as a direct democracy.

Township government is the oldest continuous form of government on the North American continent and now, more than ever, continues to meet the needs of people at the local level. The annual town meeting gives you the opportunity to "showcase" township government. Don't miss the opportunity!

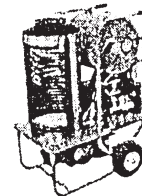
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