

THE TOWNSHIP OFFICIALS OF ILLINOIS

Perspective

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Illinois township officials

TOWNSHIP.

BRANDON WENZEL

Homer Township/Will County

2017 Robert L. Turner Scholarship Winner

Brandon Wenzel of Homer Glen interviewed Homer Township Supervisor Pam Meyers. He graduated from Lockport Township High School. He will attend the

Township Perspective



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BRANDON WENZEL was presented with the Robert L. Turner Scholarship award from TOI Director/Reed Township Supervisor Sherrill Knorr.

University of Illinois, Urbana, majoring in labor relations.

He was in Science Club, on Chess Team, Porter Press school newspaper, senior class secretary, National Honor Society tutor, baseball umpire, volunteered at Miracle League of Joliet (helping adults and children with disabilities to play baseball), and was involved with the Will County Children's Advocacy Group and Cobra Baseball. Brandon volunteered as a garden steward for the Young Sprouts Grow & Learn Garden for two summers, coordinating a weeding/watering schedule for fellow students, and overseeing crop harvest and delivery to the Lockport FISH Food Pantry.

His essay:

I WAS VERY FORTUNATE that my high school offered an Advanced Placement course in U.S. Government and Politics. Though the teacher was excellent, and we learned the roles of federal and state government, we never touched on the pivotal aspect that townships play in helping Illinois residents on a daily basis. Through my research and interview with Homer Township Supervisor Pamela Meyers, I learned a great deal about how important townships are and the three major roles they perform in maintaining roads, assessing property, and providing public aid to the poor.

The first role, maintaining roads and bridges, is one that most people generally identify with township governments. This function includes making sure roads contain proper signage, are kept safe from dangerous weather conditions, and are maintained properly throughout the year.

This is no small task, as there are over 70,000 miles

of roadways within Illinois that are safeguarded by townships. Many people are unaware that their day is almost always enhanced by the work of township road crews.

Furthermore, another crucial role of a township government is their responsibility for assessing property values for tax purposes. Although this role is not as well-known as the maintenance of roads, it is still a very important job. Townships must assess fair values to all property within township lines. This responsibility, which falls within the township assessor's scope, is a very critical task as the assessor must appraise the value of property very close to its true value in order for a fair amount of taxes to be collected. The tax that comes from this property evaluation is essential in funding township governments. Thus, the assessor plays a key role in making sure evaluations of property are correct to get the right amount of tax dollars.

The third key aspect of township government that has immense effects on some people is the township's responsibility in providing public aid to the poor. This is one area in which my interview with Pamela Meyers, the Homer Township Supervisor, shone light on how important township government can be to people in distress. Many townships in Illinois utilize a food bank to make sure that the poor are able to eat. Additionally, many townships also provide emergency relief for the poor and make certain that everybody in the community has a place to stay.

Although townships are only mandated to maintain roads and bridges, assess property values, and help the poor, they often provide many other services for their citizens. For example, many townships provide services for the elderly, children, and the disabled. For the elderly and disabled, townships help them with transportation, they provide meals, and ultimately enhance one's quality of life. Further, many townships take the role of park district in communities that do not otherwise have one. Finally, townships often have services for area youth, such as job training and recreational programs.

The township is able to conduct such services very well due to the fact that they are only responsible for a limited geographic region. This allows the township to be in constant contact with the people that they govern and to be able to know more precisely what the citizens want.

Overall, townships operate as a critical layer of government that provides residents with a much more personal experience. Township government should definitely play a role in the future of Illinois due to its ability to adapt into whatever role is necessary and the notion that its residents rely on township leaders to maintain personal relationships.