

Salter Encourages Women to Get Involved in Local Politics

By *Janine Roelens-Grant*

"There were few women in politics when I started," remarked Pat Salter, present Reeve of Peel Township, "and there was only one woman Councillor before me in Peel." Pat admits that she abbreviated her name from Patricia, thinking that she stood a better chance of getting elected if the less informed voters could not identify her as a female. But throughout the 1980s, women have made definite inroads into the world of politics, and especially municipal politics.

Pat Salter's record since her first election to Peel Township Council in 1980 is proof of the advances women have made in local politics. Beginning in 1980, Pat served a three-year term as a Township Councillor. In 1983, she was elected the first woman Deputy Reeve, and served two three-year terms in that position. And she was acclaimed as Peel Township's first woman Reeve in 1989; a position that she holds until November of this year.

Pat reflects on how her position and work load in politics has changed over the years. As Councillor she attended two Council meetings a month, and as representative for Peel Council on the Fergus Hospital Board her meetings increased to four. As Deputy Reeve her monthly meetings doubled to six or eight - adding the Drayton-Peel Fire Board and Arthur Recreation Committee meetings to her regular Council and Fergus Hospital Board commitments.

Today, "a lot of time is taken up in meetings, not counting social functions," said Pat. As Reeve she attends six or eight meetings a week, and sometimes as many as three or four in one day. In addition to Township Council meetings, Pat's position as Reeve has greatly expanded her responsibilities at the County level. She has served on the Wellington County Council as Chairman of the Administration/Finance/Personnel Committee, and is presently a member of the committee for Planning and Waste Management.

She is now the County's representative on the Fergus Hospital Board, and is also a member of the Blundell Committee for the Guelph-Wellington Hospital Redevelopment. As well, Pat represents Peel Township on Wellington Recycling.

"It's an incredibly busy job," said Pat, "but it's been a team effort." She has seen her role as Reeve as providing leadership for Council and encouraging them to make the wisest decision for the majority of the people. She explained, "only 23 cents of every tax dollar remains in the municipality, and it has to be spent wisely."

Pat admits that in the last decade she has seen a lot of improvements in the administration of the Township. She



Pat Salter, Reeve of Peel Township

acknowledged that markings and signs on the paved township roads and the establishment of procedural bylaws for Council meetings were just two of the many advancements.

Presently, the Council is dealing with the issues of land development in the township, severance bylaws, and updating Peel Township's Official Plan. And, Pat remarked, "the landfill site has been a thorn in our side for eight years." She explained that she had been a member of the citizen's group formed to stop the dump from locating near Alma. "Now, there is a new site, a new bunch of people, and a new fight on our hands," she added.

Pat acknowledges that her ambition is to be Warden of Wellington County. "It may be a little bit self-serving," she said, "but when you go into an organization you strive for the top - the pinnacle."

"Besides, women have a lot to offer. Most women are inquisitive. If there is something they don't know, they'll find out from whatever resources they need. I think a woman's influence is good for a community because she can look at things from motherhood and other perspectives, rather than just the dollar and cents perspective."

Pat encourages women to get involved in local politics. The only formal prerequisite is being a resident of the Township. "The best approach is to gain experience and attend Council meetings. It will introduce you to how the municipality works. Opportunities are available - apply to be on committees or apply for municipal appointee positions, such as a fence viewer or livestock evaluator."

"Getting involved in politics makes women more worldly," Pat suggested. "It gets them out of their kitchens and out of their homes and they are able to talk about political issues. Still, they are wives and mothers and caregivers, and they still find time to make a contribution to issues facing the community."

Beyond politics, Pat Salter has contributed a great deal to her community. Pat was born in Toronto and raised in the town of Stratford. She admits: "I had no experience with rural life until I married and moved to Perth County." Pat and her husband, Jack, lived in Brunner, near Milverton, for 8 years. It was here that neighbours encouraged her to get involved in 4-H. She completed ten clubs and became a 4-H leader for a few years. At the same time she became a member of the Gravel Ridge WI.

Then, Jack's work brought them to Wellington County, where they have lived in Alma for the past 23 years. In

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