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## LVPC's "Answer Man" Geoff Reese Retires After 42 Years

Over the past four decades in the offices of the LVPC, Director of Environmental Planning Geoff Reese has built a reputation for low-octane coffee, wearing a tie to even the most informal work get-together and offering "opportunities" his colleagues knew meant they were about to get a lot of work.

Outside these offices he is simply known as the Lehigh Valley's foremost expert on stormwater management, one of the region's most-respected engineers and the co-author of groundbreaking environmental reports and analyses that's helped shape life across Lehigh and Northampton counties.

More than 42 years after Geoff arrived at the LVPC for a job his bosses thought he'd keep for a year, he retired, effective May 13, leaving behind a legacy of dedication that impacts all 62 Lehigh Valley municipalities.

"It's been a great ride," Geoff said during his final Commission Board meeting. "This place has become a second home. I know some of my colleagues may think I never go home. I'm really proud of the work we do here and grateful for the support I've always been given by this board, the counties, former executive director Mike Kaiser and now Becky [Bradley]."

"Geoff is one of the best people and professional planners and engineers I have ever had the privilege to know and work alongside," LVPC Executive Director Becky Bradley said. "We are blessed in the Lehigh Valley to have you and I'm really going to miss you - even the decaf coffee."

Even the longest-running Commission board members can't remember a time when Geoff wasn't setting the region's environmental policy. His run of attending an estimated 500 monthly Commission meetings ended April 28.

"I guess now I'm the senior member on the Commission," said Percy Dougherty, a former longtime Lehigh County Commissioner who's been on the board since the mid-1980s. "I remember how other counties complained that we were getting all the stormwater [grant] money. It was all thanks to you."

Known for his wry humor, bad puns and calming effect he brings to every project he leads, Geoff's had an unmistakable presence among his colleagues. Never a moment of fluster, never a suggestion that something couldn't be done and the next four-letter explicative he utters in frustration would be his first. Frequently the first into the office and the last to leave, when he wasn't in the community making complex concepts seem simple, Geoff could often be found hunched over a collection of blueprints, reviewing the fine details for one of the roughly 180 major developments that require stormwater plans in any given year.

But his impact goes well beyond the thousands of development projects he's worked to make environmentally sound and will last long after he's done shoveling peanut M&Ms from his secret stash to his colleagues. All 16 of the Lehigh Valley's watersheds now have stormwater management plans designed to control flooding and protect the environment. Geoff had a hand in all of them. And if an environmental analysis or report has been done by the LVPC in the last four decades, Geoff has likely authored it or played a major role in it. The list is too long to lay out but includes groundbreaking analysis such as the Lehigh Valley's - and Pennsylvania's -- first regional Hazard Mitigation Plan in 2005, the 2014 Climate and Energy Element that was among the first in the state to begin to list ways to combat Climate Change, and the 2014 Return on Environment report, which showed in clear dollars and cents how much the preservation of our air, water, woodlands and more added to the local economy. For example, living near protected open space adds nearly \$15,000 to a property's value - that's \$1.8 billion Valleywide - and residents avoid more than \$54 million in healthcare costs due to the presence of trees and open space.

Other plans with Geoff's fingerprints include Livable Landscapes Plans for Lehigh and Northampton County, Green Infrastructure Guidelines that show developers a better way to build, multi-municipal comprehensive plans involving dozens of Lehigh Valley communities, and the last three regional comprehensive plans, which set the long-term plan for development,

growth and the protection of the environment for a region of 687,508 people. The most recent, *FutureLV: The Regional Plan*, in 2021, won the Governor's Award for Innovative Planning and Sound Land Use Practices.

Former Portand Mayor Lance Prator first called the LVPC 15 years ago with a stormwater runoff question and Geoff happened to pick up.

"Geoff's the answer man. Every time we turn around, he's involved in some major project that's key to a community or region, and every time it happens, we know we're in good hands," said Prator, who's had a longtime fascination with the Oscar Meyer wiener mobile. "He's helped so many times I consider him a friend. He's one of the few people I've presented with a wiener whistle. Just a fantastic individual."

As an engineer, Brien Kocher's developed a great respect for Geoff's expertise and as a Bushkill Township Supervisor who is chairing the Nazareth Area Multi-Municipal Comprehensive Plan he's appreciated Geoff's ability to deftly address the needs of all 10 communities in the plan.

"My first year, 32 years ago, he developed that Monocacy Creek watershed plan. He built the model we're all still using today," Kocher said. "You just don't find so much institutional knowledge all in one place. I'm having trouble imagining what it will be like when he's not there."

Those kinds of accolades have been flying around the region since news of Geoff's retirement made the rounds to the many municipal partners he's worked with since 1980. Like most things, Geoff takes it all in stride.

Geoff said he won't miss feeling like there wasn't enough hours in each day to accomplish all he wanted, and he won't miss the occasional misstep in trying to help a community, like the time he and his team was a little over-aggressive in opening a package of red tracing dye they planned to use to test a North Whitehall Township community's sewage flow.

"Red dye everywhere," Geoff chuckled. "This woman let us into her perfectly put-together home and we turned it into something that looked like a crime scene."

What he will miss most is developing a plan or analysis, and then presenting it to a community in a way that everyone can understand.

"I just really like presenting information to people and talking with them about it," Geoff said. "I enjoy the process of developing the information and then trying to reach everyone. It's one of the really special things about working [at the LVPC]."

Now, that there will be a lot more free hours in his days, Geoff plans to spend more time with his wife, Robin, three children and families, and two grandchildren. He hopes to get back to being an avid cyclist, wants to learn to fly fish and intends on getting to long-delayed projects like building a new barn on his property in Bethlehem Township and restoring his first car – a 1963 Oldsmobile Cutlass Convertible.

"I've worked with a lot of great people over the years, on the LVPC staff, Commission and throughout the Lehigh Valley. We've dealt with, and continue to deal with, important environmental and broader planning issues," Geoff said. "I'm thankful to have been able to make a contribution and look forward to seeing great things from the LVPC and Lehigh Valley moving forward."

