

Libby White

Dedication, Motivation and a Spirit of Giving

“When you get involved with people, you always get back more than you give,” says Libby White. That could be the reason why at age 70, instead of choosing retirement, she ran for and was elected the mayor of Doylestown. Now in the first year of her second term in office, Mayor White’s enthusiasm and dedication have renewed the spirit of a historic town.

Life Before Politics

As the daughter of a military father who served in the Pacific during World War II, a young White moved around for much of her childhood. For her, “home” was Fort Riley, Kan., then Ames, Iowa and onto Aberdeen, Md. “I remember Ames was wonderful place to live because they actually had sidewalks, so I could roller skate,” recalls White. In Aberdeen, she attended a two-room schoolhouse without indoor plumbing. “Our favorite activity was playing dodge ball, and a glass of chocolate milk was a big treat,” White remembers. “Life was a whole lot simpler then.”

Inspired by a high-school music teacher, the teenager chose to attend West Chester University, where she pursued a degree in music education. And while

the Delaware County campus afforded her the opportunity to explore one of her life’s loves, it would also introduce another. It was there that she met Lou White. After graduating in 1953 and teaching elementary school back in Maryland for five years, she and Lou married and, in 1964, moved to Doylestown, where they raised two sons. “It was a wonderful place to live then,” White says, “and it still is. I often hear people say, ‘I couldn’t live anyplace else,’ and I feel the same way.”

Eventually, though, White returned to school. Having always been interested in “what makes people tick,” she chose to pursue her M.Ed. in Counseling at Lehigh University and became a school counselor at Franconia Elementary School. She also returned to another passion: music. Having long been drawn to the resonating, haunting tone of the harp, White learned



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to play the instrument herself. Soon after, she took her show on the road, performing at area weddings and family parties.

Finding Her Way Into Office

As the years passed, White was drawn to another calling. In 2003, she was instrumental in the founding of the Doylestown Democrats, which first held its meetings in a member's basement. It's goal: to get more local Democrats elected into office. Little did she know that she would eventually be their candidate.

"I never pictured myself in public office," says White. "I enjoyed being an activist and getting other people elected because I believe in my party and its values." But members of the group were struck by her civic pride and admired her relentless optimism. Before long, they were passing her notes that read, "Libby for Mayor." And what started as gentle prodding from a few friends and colleagues soon turned into a reality. In 2005, White was elected as the first female mayor of Doylestown.

"I think it may have been hard for some people to see a woman in this role because one of the biggest responsibilities is the oversight of the police department," she says. "I know I had a lot to learn, and I have a deep respect for the job that they do. It's not easy, and it can be dangerous." As part of her newfound role in public office, White took time to develop her relationship with the police chief and his officers and learn the standards of police work.

Public Service

While White was feeling out her new office and responsibilities, another of her duties included her involvement in the Senior Task Force. Meeting monthly, the group had been debating the issues – and hopefully solutions – relating to seniors in the area, believing that the way to help local senior citizens was not by treating

them as an isolated group, but rather by connecting them with people of all ages throughout the community.

From this philosophy, the Doylestown Borough Commission for All Ages was born. It's mission: to promote interaction between residents of all ages by creating formal and informal connections through community activities, volunteer groups and individual relationships. The commission is seeking anyone, including students, interested in paying friendly visits, helping with daily chores or simply making the life of seniors more varied and interesting through interactions and activities. "Since joining the Commission for All Ages, I have come to know Libby White as a sensitive and caring individual," says Pat Keppler, who serves as the chairperson for the organization. "She is responsive to the spoken and unspoken concerns of our commission and to the Doylestown Borough community."

And Keppler is far from the only person in local government willing to give White a glowing review. "The mayor is expected to be a unifying figure and to bring people together in the community," says Borough Manager John Davis. "Mayor White does that quite well with a sense of grace and dignity that represents the character of the town itself."

Doylestown Borough Councilman John Buckman says, "Mayor White has a strong commitment to promote Doylestown in a positive way. She is very active in the daily life and business of the borough and has created a number of beneficial programs." And "Clean and Green," spearheaded by White in 2006, serves as a prime example of one of those programs. Her initiative coordinates volunteers to meet at Starbucks on the second Saturday of every month from April through November to pick up litter from the sidewalks in town. The Public Works Department provides a truck, bags, brooms and any other needed supplies. "The program has really grown,"



says White. "I feel good that people see this as a clean town with a lot of 'civic pride' volunteers who love to get involved."

One of White's concerns during her tenure in office has centered on the issue of young people socializing in groups, disrupting area businesses and causing confrontations when asked to move. Her office and the Borough Council worked on a plan that issued citations to any kids who were, after being warned, still acting disorderly. The plan included stricter enforcement by police, letters sent to the parents of those who had been cited and the installation of cameras in areas that were repeatedly vandalized. So far, their actions have been successful at changing behaviors while still keeping Doylestown a welcome and enjoyable place for people of all ages to visit and shop.

White sees her office as a central force in helping preserve the character of Doylestown and enhancing the quality of life for all residents, an outgrowth, perhaps, of her small-town roots. To that end,

she's grateful for the many hard-working people in administration, who tirelessly work alongside her, as well as the various members of the community who serve in the Doylestown Fire Company, the Doylestown Business and Community Alliance and the Doylestown Revitalization Board. "These people give so much by the conscientious work that they do every day," says White.

And while holding public office may have been an unexpected turn in White's life, you'd be hard pressed to find a better representative of the town's spirit. "I am honored to be the mayor of Doylestown," says White. "I think there is a character about the town, representing pride, well-being and culture that makes it an amazing place to visit and live." *d*

For more information on volunteering with the Commission for All Ages, email Pat Keppler at pat.keppler@gmail.com. For those interested in participating in the "Clean and Green" program, call Judy Maneval at 215.348.4362.