

McGugan likes to get things done

PROFILE: Mayor's family arrived in Lambton in 1847

Don McGugan is willing to admit something's missing in his life.

"I do not have any hobbies," said the mayor of Brooke-Alvinston Township, "and I know that's wrong."

Everyone should have a hobby, he said, adding the farm on Old Walnut Road where he grows azuki beans for export to Japan and other cash crops may be as close as it comes.

And although he retired from Dow after 34 years, McGugan decided this fall's municipal election wasn't the time to retire from politics.

"I could spend winters in Florida," he said, "but what would I do?"

McGugan said he still enjoys "95%" of the job of being mayor.

"I enjoy working with people and I enjoy the success of getting things done."

McGugan's roots in his community, and it's political life, run deep.

His ancestors arrived in what was the Brooke Township just five years after it officially formed in 1842, and they settled down on Old Walnut Road in 1882.

In 1905, his grandfather spent \$1,900 for 100 acres of land, and the same amount building a house for his bride.

The family was originally from Skye, an island off the Scottish coast. McGugan recalls his grandfather saying it was all "rock and sheep and no money."

While he hasn't visited the homeland himself, McGugan said his daughter did years ago and reported the island is now all "sheep and bed and breakfasts."

McGugan's great-grandfather served on township council in the late 1800s and his father was reeve for a decade.

McGugan himself was born at the family home on Old Walnut Road and attended a one-room school house.

After three years at high school in Watford, he went to agricultural college in Ridgetown where he graduated in 1958.

During the years he worked at Dow, including 24 years as a maintenance foreman, McGugan kept his farmland.

He married Anne, a school teacher, and they raised two children — a daughter who is a nurse practitioner in North Carolina and a son who is a financial adviser — and have a six-year-old granddaughter.

McGugan traces his interest in community service back to when he was young showing calves and pigs in 4-H, and later serving as president of the Lambton County Junior Farmers. It continued in 2000-2001 when he was president of the Lambton Federation of Agriculture.

In 1997, McGugan won a spot on Brooke Township council and was re-elected in 2000, at the time it amalgamated with Alvinston.

Then, in 2002, he was appointed to head council days after the death of Mayor Leonard McNeil. He was acclaimed mayor in 2003 and won re-election in the two elections that followed, including this fall's vote.

An honorary deacon at Brooke-Enniskillen Baptist Church and a board member with the Children's Aid Society and Lambton Rural Childcare, McGugan said, "I've always had a soft spot for those on the outside fringes of society."

He's proud of his community and what it has accomplished.

"It's a farming community," he said, "good farmers, good land."

But, having such a small number of businesses and industries makes it a challenge for the township to find the tax revenue to pay for the services its residents desire, he said.

At 71, McGugan said he feels fortunate to still enjoy good health. He made it through a bout with cancer in 2002 and has lived for several decades with limited sight caused by an eye condition known as histoplasmosis.

He credits Anne for her help with the mounds of reading that come with being mayor, as well as his own sharp memory, for overcoming that particular challenge.

"I've really been fortunate," McGugan said. "A good job, good land, a good family life, and a good community to live and work and serve in."

"I need to be thankful for that."

