



John C. Ackerman

Tazewell County Board

Continuing a Family Tradition of Community Service

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February ASO Magazine Column **End of A Decade**

As we have closed the door on this past decade, it provided an opportunity to look back and reflect on the changes that have occurred. In doing so, I realized that I have recently closed the door on my first decade of public service to you. Beginning in 1999 with my election to the Washington City Council, continuing into 2000 when I was the Republican Candidate for Tazewell County Recorder of Deeds, into my elections in 2002 and 2008 to the Tazewell County Board, it has been my honor to serve the citizens of Tazewell County.

While many things have changed nationally, locally we have seen changes as well. In 1999 the City of Washington was discussing and planning growth to the new Bypass U.S. 24 as something for the future, and today we see the realities of the plans made then. The City of Washington received a grant from retiring State Representative John C. "Jay" Ackerman to use to purchase some vacant land for future use. Today, that land is the home of 5Points Community Center and that purchase made with that grant was the catalyst to starting that community project.

At the county level, I enlisted the assistance of Tazewell County Highway Director Norman Johansen to review an old road project from 1978 that was proposed by my friend Mahlon Blumenshine. This year we break ground on that project; the Summit Road Extension. Illinois Route 8 upgrades were already one of the top priorities of the region, and I was happy to join the chorus singing the need to get funding. Today not only has all of the funding been earmarked, but also the first phase is completed, the second will be completed next year, the third will begin shortly thereafter and the fourth and final phase is in the final design stage. Add to that the fact that the current section under construction at the eastern edge of East Peoria will include extensive landscaping and a pedestrian friendly and aesthetically appealing design and you have something the residents of that area and the surrounding areas can be very proud of.

During my campaign for Tazewell County Recorder of Deeds, the only election I would lose in the decade, I spoke of the need for more information to be made available on this new technology called the internet. Later, during both terms on the Tazewell County Board, I would continue this call for more availability of information. As you have seen recently, we have finally started down that path with the release of the newly upgraded Tazewell County Website. This is hopefully only the beginning as far as information availability and I will continue to push for more up-to-date releases.

Personally, you have given me the opportunity to continue to grow into the roles you have placed me in. I have continued to demand more accountability and openness to Government and have tried to raise the bar as far as expectations of our elected officials. I have come to see more and more that Government in its current form is too slow to adapt to the changing times. Too much is still done in smoke-filled cloakrooms and behind closed doors. Too much important information and too many facts are kept from the public.

I have and will continue to bring this information out for all to see just as I did by pressing for an improved county website and as I currently am doing with my yearly meetings with each municipality and township. While some on the County Board are looking to improve our communication with statewide candidates, I am looking here at home and working to improve our communication with our local governmental bodies and citizens. I have also come to see the old political games and deals as outdated and will continue to bring my message to those that have elected me and in their hands place my future. I have been and will continue to be a servant and voice of the people, not an agent of the political establishment.

Too many in government today look to the past to solve our problems. They look at what has been done traditionally here rather than looking outside the box to see if there is a better answer. I have and will continue to look at other governmental units throughout the state and region as well as the business world when looking for ways to improve. And in the same light, I will continue to push for better planning and preparation of how will we improve and solve our oncoming problems rather than the current course of waiting until the problem blows up or continuing to wastefully do something the way it has always been done for no better reason than we did not want change.

Over the past year, I have always ended these types of letters with; "I consider it an honor and a privilege to serve you on the Tazewell County Board and if I can be of any assistance to you, please do not hesitate to contact me." I mean each and every word of that quote, as it is truly an honor to serve the great citizens of Tazewell County. You can call on me anytime via the website, my new blog, my new Facebook page, mailing address or phone. As we close this decade and start fresh another, it is my hope and goal that while we have learned from our mistakes of the past and appreciate the goals accomplished we also do not lose focus on the reason we were elected to office; to serve the needs of the people of Tazewell County. And while my youthful idealism has been replaced with a decade of realism of how the process works, I still believe and will continue to believe that we can change and improve the process through the power of the people.

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