

JCP Position Comes Full Circle for Souderton Borough Councilman

By Dan Yocum, Souderton Borough Council

In 2008 I was asked to be the Junior Borough Council Person (JCP) in my hometown of Souderton Borough, Montgomery County, and it was an opportunity that would have a major impact on my life. The two years I spent serving in the capacity of Junior Council inspired me to study public administration in college, on Capitol Hill, and then return me to my hometown to serve as an elected member of Souderton Borough Council. The JCP position solidified my belief in community service and inspired me to pursue it in many aspects of my life.

The JCP Program is a statewide initiative that aims to get young people involved in their local communities. It allows for youth to take an active role in the governing process of their municipalities and brings a young, fresh perspective to councils across the state. While the JCP does not have an official vote on council, he or she does have a voice and an official seat at the table. It is a mutually beneficial relationship for both the borough officials and the youth.

My experience was extremely positive. I served as a Souderton JCP from 2008 until mid-2010. My family had always been active in Souderton; in fact,

my great-great-great grandfather, Henry O. Souder, was the founder of the borough. Until that point I had been active in the community through church, school, and sports and thought that I may have a general interest in politics. When I was approached by my high school guidance counselor to be appointed to the position, I felt it was a natural fit.

When I began serving on council in 2008, Souderton was undergoing a major revitalization. As a high school junior, I was perhaps not well equipped to comprehend dense budgets and complex revenue streams, but I could certainly add value to planning for a new community pool, streetscaping, traffic calming, etc., and I was pleasantly surprised to hear how much my opinion was valued by other council members.

Being a JCP was a bit of an intimidating situation. In student government or similar positions, it was easy to talk to a group of your peers. As a 16-year-old sitting in an ill-fitting suit around a large conference table talking with individuals who were more experienced, I felt like I would never be comfortable enough to share my opinions. However, the council members were very friendly and welcoming, and



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seemed interested in my opinions on the issues. With time, I grew more confident and got more involved. I fell in love with the job and the service I could give to my community.

By 2010 I had served two full terms and had decided I wanted to pursue similar endeavors in my future. I chose to pursue a master's degree in public administration at George Mason University. While in pursuit of this degree, I had the opportunity to work in the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate. I credit these opportunities largely to the seeds planted during my tenure as a JCP.

By 2014 I was ready to move back to my hometown. At that same time a position on Souderton Borough Council became available after one member retired from the seat. I ran





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unopposed in both the primary and general elections and won the full-voting seat on borough council. I was now seated at the same table next to many of the same people as when I was the nervous, but inspired, 16-year-old.

I tell this story to suggest how powerful the JCP Program can be

in communities throughout the state. I do not know how many of these students go on to elected office, but the position certainly sets you up for success in any avenue of life. It teaches necessary life skills such as teamwork, compromise, public speaking, budgeting, and above all else, community service.

If you do not have a JCP Program in your borough, I encourage you to set one up. If you do have one, mentor your JCP to his or her fullest potential. Give the JCP a special project that gives him or her ownership. For

me, that was helping to fund-raise for our new community swimming pool. Hear their opinions, questions, and concerns. It is a mutually beneficial relationship that brings them a great introduction to public service and brings your community a wonderful and often under-represented perspective from the youth in your community. (B)

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Does your borough want to engage youth in its local government process? If so, the Junior Council Person Program (JCP) provides guidelines and support to help you mentor the leaders of tomorrow.

By implementing a JCP Program, you can help students in your borough learn more about public speaking, citizen engagement, team building, collaboration, budgeting, and meeting preparation.

The Pennsylvania State Association of Boroughs (PSAB) has created tools to streamline the process. Download a brochure and other resources to help your borough get started.

For more information:

Visit PSAB's website, www.boroughs.org, and select "Programs" and then click "Junior Council Person Program".

Contact Stephanie Drake at sdrake@boroughs.org or 800-232-7722, Ext. 1017