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Sussex County
Government

News Profile

Sussex County Utility Permits Director Gary Tonge

Georgetown, Del., April 4, 2006: Gary Tonge's career has always been about making connections.

In more than 30 years of employment with a regional telephone company, first as a field technician and then in management, Mr. Tonge did everything from wiring telephone lines and monitoring communications systems to managing employees and dealing with customers.

After a short retirement, beginning in 2003, Mr. Tonge decided he still had to connect with people and the working world, so he took on a job as communications specialist for Sussex County government's Information Systems department. There, Mr. Tonge was back to making sure calls always went through.



Gary Tonge

Now Mr. Tonge is in a new role, as Sussex County's Director of Utility Permits. It has nothing to do with telephones or communications equipment. It means a different office and different tasks. But there is one unmistakable similarity to his old line of work: he's still in the business of making connections.

The Utility Permits office in Sussex County's Engineering Department is responsible for reviewing and issuing permits for the more than 2,500 applications submitted annually by customers wanting to connect to county-managed sewer systems. It is Mr. Tonge's office that

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gives customers the OK to hook up their homes and businesses to the hundreds of miles of sewer pipes the county manages.

While the job is different, and Mr. Tonge admits he's still learning the ins and outs of a new office, he finds himself quite at home.

"It's very much the same environment. You're handling hook-ups and disconnects, posting new facilities to the records and working with customers," Mr. Tonge said. "In one case, you're dealing with copper wires. In the other you're working with plastic pipes."

Name: Gary D. Tonge
Age: 56
Residence: Georgetown
Occupation: Director of Utility Permits, Sussex County Engineering Department
Responsibilities: Oversees a division of nearly a dozen staffers who process applications for permits to connect to county-managed sewer systems
Background: worked 30 years, first as a field technician and then in various management positions, for a major regional telephone company, the fourth generation of his family to work in the telecommunications sector; veteran of U.S. Army; former Georgetown Town Council member and vice-mayor, and currently serving on the town's Board of Adjustment
Education: high school graduate; some collegiate coursework at University of Delaware and Delaware Technical & Community College

"In either case, you're dealing with a network, with infrastructure and a system that is vital to the people who use it," Mr. Tonge added.

Mr. Tonge's new position was, up until recently, among the various duties of Assistant County Engineer Russell Archut. Some of those duties have since been spun off into two new positions, which are among a number of managerial changes made within county government in recent weeks to improve efficiency and customer service.

County Engineer Michael Izzo said when officials were looking for someone to take over the division, Mr. Tonge had the right skill sets to do the job.

"We have here a person who was already familiar, somewhat, with the county system," Mr. Izzo said. "And as far as his background, experience in management was specifically what we were looking for. That's what we need, and Gary's definitely an asset to our department."

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This is the third in an occasional series of profiles about some of the newest members of Sussex County government.