

# Buddy Johnson takes office as Bellefonte's new mayor following unopposed election | Centre Daily Times

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By Halie Kines



Buddy Johnson was sworn in as the new Bellefonte mayor on Saturday. Abby Drey [adrey@centredaily.com](mailto:adrey@centredaily.com)

Gene “Buddy” Johnson, a longtime Bellefonte resident, was sworn in as mayor of Bellefonte this past Saturday.

Johnson has lived in Bellefonte for more than 20 years and is a teacher at Bellefonte Area School District. The Republican ran unopposed in the general election and is taking the place of Tom Wilson, who served as mayor since 2013. Johnson said he admires Wilson’s years of service and dedication to the Bellefonte community, and is thankful for all the help Wilson has given him.

In a voters guide put together by the League of Women Voters of Centre County, Johnson said his top three priorities if elected would be bridging the gap between our community and the borough council, as well as the police department, ensuring the community is safe and comfortable, and work so community members are heard and proud to live in Bellefonte.

The Centre Daily Times recently interviewed Johnson to learn more about his vision, goals and challenges ahead. Below are his responses, which have been edited for clarity and length.

**Centre Daily Times: Now that you've officially been elected mayor of Bellefonte, what are you feeling?**

**Buddy Johnson:** Very excited. This is something that I've always dreamed of and wanted to do ever since meeting a previous mayor, Stan Goldman, when I first moved there.

I absolutely love our community. It's a beautiful town filled with great people and I'm very, very excited to have this experience to be able to help our community in any possible way that I can.

I moved here 21 years ago. I'm in education, I'm a health and phys ed teacher. I try through my teaching to have a very good rapport with all of my students. It's amazing, a lot of those students that I've built that rapport with are now productive members of our community. I do know a lot of them and I have kids who have been very active in sports, in community service and with the school. So I feel that I have met a tremendous amount of people and I feel I have a decent rapport with them.

**CDT: What do you plan to do to get out and meet with people in the community who may not already know you?**

**BJ:** I'm going to obviously start attending the borough council meetings and ... I would like to be visible. I would like to be in town, I would like to possibly have a "meet the mayor" night somewhere. I would like to go to all of the local businesses in the town and give them my card and just let them know, 'Hey, I'm here for you. If anything ever arises, let me know.' I haven't made it yet, but I'm going to make a Facebook page, so that will be something that people can get to know me a little bit better. And obviously, they can call my office and call the borough office and speak with me at any time.

**CDT: Are there any challenges that you think you might have in your new role?**

**BJ:** I don't know — if that's an acceptable answer. I've met with Tom Wilson a couple times. He has been excellent. He's been great with helping me. I've spoken with Ralph Stewart (borough manager) and everybody downtown and they are more than helpful. Any questions that I have, they answer, and they say they're available at any time. So obviously, when somebody comes into this position, there's going to be a learning curve. I've met with Chief (Shawn) Weaver and I've spoken to him and I'm very, very excited to work with him and the police force that we have in Bellefonte. Specifics, I don't really know. There's going to be a learning curve, but one thing that I can guarantee the community is that I will do my absolute best and work as hard as I can for our community.

**CDT: Do you have any ideas or projects that you're excited to start working on once you take office?**

**BJ:** I'm always thinking and always coming up with ideas. I don't really want to state any of the plans or ideas that I have before I run them by borough council or anything, but initially we have the waterfront project going on and I'm going to be blessed to be part of that. There is so much potential and upside in the town of Bellefonte and if I can be a help and a part of anything positive in the town, it's going to be a success, and it's going to be very rewarding.

As far as specific things, I just want to help the community. I want to bridge the gap between whatever issues or problems they're having. I'm not always going to have the answers and our community's not always going to get the answer that they like, but like I said, I can guarantee them that I will work as hard as I can and support our community.

**CDT: How do you hope to see Bellefonte either change or remain the same while you are the mayor?**

**BJ:** The town itself has a tremendous upside. It's just a beautiful town. I'd like to see more businesses come in and more foot traffic in town. And I think that as a borough council and being mayor, I think we need to figure out a way to get more people, more foot traffic, in our town. So some of the ideas I have lead to, how can we make Bellefonte even more accessible to people to come enjoy what the town has to offer?

**What aspects of being mayor are you looking forward to the most?**

**BJ:** Community. My personal philosophy — and this has come to light a lot since the pandemic — is I truly believe if we can take care of ourselves as individuals, if we can take care of our family, our friends and our loved ones, and if we can take care of our community and our neighbors, it's going to be a pretty good life for everybody. If I can do my part to help our community, I think that Bellefonte will continue to be a great town and be a great success. I just want to try and live out my philosophy. I want to take care of my physical health and myself, I want to take care of my family and I want to do my part and take care of our community.