

Buddy Johnson Settling into Role as Bellefonte Mayor



“I’ve thoroughly enjoyed every second of being mayor” is how “Buddy” Johnson said he feels about being the mayor of Bellefonte four months into his term. Photo by Vincent Corso | The Gazette

By [Vincent Corso](#) - April 24, 2022

BELLEFONTE — On an unseasonably cold and snowy day for the Monday after Easter, Bellefonte Mayor Gene “Buddy” Johnson was all set to officiate a wedding ceremony in Talleyrand Park. But, the blustery weather forced other plans, moving the ceremony indoors.

Although he was glad to move to a less-weather affected area, it is safe to say that Johnson would have bucked up and performed the nuptials in the snow if needed, as it is one of his favorite mayoral duties.

Since taking over as mayor back in December, it is the fifth such ceremony that Johnson has performed, and he said he enjoys being there as two people make a commitment to spend the rest of their lives together.

Later that snowy evening, Johnson took part in a borough council meeting. It is all in a day’s work for Johnson, who is happy to do what he can to help the community.

"I just love it ... being part of the community, special events and trying to kind of bridge the gap between any issues or problems, people will come to me or they'll email me or they'll call me, and I'll take that to borough council," said Johnson.

A few days prior, Johnson did make it out to Talleyrand Park for the annual Easter egg hunt. The event brought back memories for Johnson, who has lived in Bellefonte for the past 23 years, raising his family and teaching health and physical education at Bellefonte Area Middle School.

He said he remembers pushing his daughter, Mia, now a 19-year-old Edinboro University student, and his son Trevor, a 16-year-old BAHS student, on the swings and watching the fish swim in the stream.

"This is a beautiful town. My hope is that other people can create the same memories that I've had — and they've been very positive, great memories with my personal family — and I hope that others can do that. If I can be a small part of that, as mayor, then it's a job well done," said Johnson.

"My family went to the egg hunt; my son was part of the baseball team who helped with the eggs. My wife and I were there and it was fun just seeing the families, how happy they were. We jumped in and helped out wherever we could. It's a great sense of accomplishment and a great sense of community. And, it's a lot of fun. I've thoroughly enjoyed every second of being mayor."

Johnson has a long history with the Victorian town. Both of his parents grew up in the Bellefonte area. Johnson was born in Tyrone and, after growing up in Turbotville, he attended Lock Haven University, where he got his health and physical education degree.

He started his teaching career in Prince George's County, Md., right outside of Washington D.C., but when he found an opening at BAMS, he took the chance to move to the town where his family has roots. He has been here ever since.

He said teaching allows him to give back and make an impact.

"I enjoy getting to know the students. I enjoy getting to see the students as they grow and run into them in high school. And I especially enjoy seeing those students be part of our community or other communities as they grow and go into their adult lives. I keep in touch, and that's a nice thing about small town, you know. I go for a walk and I see people who are now successful adults and have their own families," said Johnson.

He added with a laugh, "You know, you've been teaching a long time when you start teaching kids of the kids that you taught there. But it is really neat to have that kind of relationship and to be able to see the kids grow and succeed. To see them start their own families and be productive members of our community."

Over the past few months, Johnson has been asked a handful of times how he still teaches while he is also mayor, especially by students.

"Some people think like Mayor of Bellefonte is like the mayor of Atlanta or New York, and it's not. I look at it as adult community service. I realized the importance of that as my kids were growing up and seeing them helping out and doing community service for the school," said Johnson.

It is also a lesson he learned from his high school friend, Chris Hill, who lost his life in the line of duty as a U.S. marshal. There is a picture of Hill in Johnson's office at the borough building and he thinks of his friend often while he does his mayoral work.

"One of the things that everybody said about Chris was how he was out in the community, how he would always shake hands, how he would buy somebody who was very less fortunate, a cup of coffee, and he was just very well seen and respected in the New York area. Another big reason that I wanted to be mayor is I know that he is looking down and he is real pleased with my community service and my dedication to this town. I think he would be real happy," said Johnson.

One of his main roles as mayor is to oversee the police department. Johnson says he has enjoyed working with Chief Shawn Weaver and the department's commitment the community.

As mayor, he said he wants to continue to "bridge that gap" between community members and the borough council and staff for issues that come up.

"You know I live in the borough and I've lived here for a long time. I understand that issues come up. You know what may makes you unhappy may not make others unhappy, but I will do my best to take your issue seriously and put it at the forefront and then do what I can to bridge that gap and help with that issue," said Johnson.