

## Varnamtown's Volunteer Clerk Enjoys Serving His Community

BY DOUG RUTTER

As volunteer clerk and finance officer for the Town of Varnamtown, Paul Vealey says the satisfaction he gets out of serving his community is the only payment he needs.

"If you live in a community and that community has given you something, you should try to give a little back," Vealey said in a recent interview.

A 58-year-old native of New Jersey, Vealey and his wife, Carol, moved to the area about two years ago. For the past year, Vealey has volunteered his time and talents for Varnamtown—a small town on the Lockwood Folly River near Holden Beach which incorporated last fall.

Among his many duties as clerk and finance officer, Vealey handles all correspondence between the town and various county and state agencies. Also, he takes care of all finances for the town.

On any given day, he's likely to be on the phone with a state official in Raleigh or conversing face-to-face with an accountant, lawyer or somebody in the tax department at the county government center.

"There's a lot of information that comes down the pipe," said Vealey, who receives most of the town's mail at his home. He said he puts in about 10 or 12 hours in an average week.

Vealey said the best part of his job has been meeting and working with people. "Everybody I've talked to with the county and the state has been very helpful," he said. "That's been the nice part of the job."

A slender, thoughtful man, Vealey took the clerk's job as a volunteer because he wanted to contribute to his community. "I really feel the need to be with people," he said. "And I like to do things that will be a little bit of a challenge."

Varnamtown's elected officials have said time and time again they don't know what they would do without their clerk. But Vealey refuses to take any credit for the town's success since its incorporation last September.

He passes it right back to the town's founding mayor and board of aldermen. Listing the distinct qualities each of the six officials brought to the town's first governing board, Vealey said he respects and admires each of them.

"They've all been really good to work with," he said. "They all have the interests of the community at heart. They want nothing but the best for this community."

The Vealeys—who like so many other retirees love calling Brunswick County their home—came a long

way to get to Varnamtown. After graduating from high school in Franklin, N. J., in 1949, Vealey served three years in the Army before finding his niche as a quality assurance and calibration technician.

Starting at the bottom of the totem pole, Vealey said he worked his way up through the ranks and is a past supervisor of one of the Army's most important research and development centers.

After nearly 34 years as a federal government employee, Vealey took early retirement in January 1987. He and his wife moved from Sussex County, N. J., to their home in Riverside. They have one son, David, who recently moved to Wilmington with his wife and baby girl.

Vealey said his work with the federal government prepared him well for his duties as finance officer for the town since he was used to budgeting. "I handle town funds the same way I handle my own—very carefully," he said. "I'm not stingy, but if you can buy something for two dollars why pay ten?"

Although he plans to serve the town as long as he can contribute, Vealey figures he will eventually have to step down. In a few years, he said the town will probably need a paid employee or two. That, he said, will depend on how the governing board decides to handle matters such as building inspections and street maintenance.

"That's what makes this job interesting—listening to the different people on the board," he said. "It's interesting to find out their ideas and what direction they want the community to go in."

Despite moving from the shadows of New York City to the quiet fishing village of Varnamtown, Vealey said the adjustment wasn't difficult. He said the friendly nature of local people and the county's natural beauty made the transition easy.

Besides the change in scenery, Vealey pointed out that one of the biggest differences he's noticed since moving is that Brunswick County residents take the time to enjoy their surroundings. "They've got a good thing, and they appreciate it."

He said it's the enjoyment of the simple things such as birds fluttering through the pine trees or the setting sun shimmering off the river that make life special.

"I think most of all it's the people right here in this community. They've got something wonderful here. It's a great location with the river, the ocean and the clean air," Smiling at his wife, he adds, "We picked the right spot."



PAUL VEALEY, volunteer clerk and finance officer for Varnamtown, works at his home in Riverside. STAFF PHOTO BY DOUG RUTTER

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