

Gaye Lenderbeck, Councillor, RM of Shell River

By Lynne Bereza, AMM Communications Coordinator

Gaye Lenderbeck is a very busy woman. Currently in year three of her first term in office for the RM of Shell River, Lenderbeck chairs the Roblin, Shell River, Hillsburg Recreation Commission; she chairs the Economic Development Support Committee; she represents the RM of Shell River on the Roblin Soil Conservation Board, on the Lake of the Prairies Conservation District and on the Roblin and District Planning Commission; and she sits on a number of internal committees on RM Council.

Outside of council, Lenderbeck is a director of Ranchers Choice Beef Co-op.

With such a busy schedule one has to wonder what enticed Lenderbeck to municipal politics? “I saw how some large issues concerning our community were becoming of increasing importance to the area and I felt I had something to offer to help bring some kind of resolution to these problems,” explains Lenderbeck. “With the experience that I had in agriculture and my experience gained from other boards, especially the Manitoba Rural Adaptation Council (MRAC), I felt that I could contribute something useful.”

Lenderbeck has accomplished much during her first three years on council, including bringing forward the annexation of Park North to the RM of Shell River and signing a joint agreement with the Town of

Roblin for an economic development office. But, there is plenty more she wants to do. “I would like to get several issues finished in my first term,” she says. “I would like to see the completion of the annexation of Park North to the RM of Shell River. I’d like to see the Development Plan for our Planning District completed. It is so important that we move forward with a sense of vision within our community. We are also rewriting the vision, mission and policy manual and Municipal Agreement for our joint Recreation Commission and I would like to have this completed.”

As the sole woman on the Shell River council, Lenderbeck recognizes that women do face specific challenges. “There is no doubt”, she says. “Some men *and* women are reluctant to acknowledge that women are capable of being in such a position. The role of Councillor is so much more than road building and people don’t always realize that. There is a huge amount of learning to do around all the issues that are involved.”

Lenderbeck says being open to learning and asking questions is important. “The key is to be receptive to learning and realize that there are areas that you don’t know and may never know. There are people who are experts – don’t be scared to ask for help. My fellow Councillors are all very helpful and we cooperate on handling issues that each of us may have some expertise in. I am continually working on adding to the list of people that I can count on to give me good advice.”

What, then, would be Lenderbeck’s advice to a woman

considering becoming involved in municipal politics? She encourages it, despite the time involved. “My advice would be to put your name forward if you think it may be something that interests you. It is a big time commitment and there is no end to the work that you could be involved in, but it is very interesting and rewarding.” A supportive family is essential as well. “My family has been tremendously supportive of my foray into politics. My husband has been wonderful about my time spent away from the house and the barn. We calve out about three hundred cows in the early spring and I have had to be away from time to time leaving behind a great deal of work for him to handle on his own. He understands the importance that I place on this work and helps out whenever he can.”

Lenderbeck hopes she can be an inspiration to other women to enter politics. “I was encouraged by a woman who I have tremendous respect for and, looking back, I’m not sure that I would have taken the step on my own,” she admits. “I appreciate the opportunity to encourage other women to step forward into participating in boards and committees with respect to creating policy and making decisions in areas like politics, business and agriculture. Women have great qualities when asked to look at the big picture on issues and have tremendous ability to implement and organize on a lower level.”

With just over a year to go until the next municipal election, Lenderbeck has some sage advice for women considering following in her footsteps. “Don’t be intimidated by the community or the attitude that it’s all about gravel and roads. There is nothing that you cannot learn. You can make a big difference and you have the ability to contribute something valuable to the community that you live in.” ❖

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Shell River Councillor Gaye Lenderbeck (R) poses with young local artist Janelle Laviolette, whose work will hang in the municipal office.

