Spotlight on Freeholder Virginia E. Haines

Ocean County Board of Chosen Freeholders Director Virginia E. "Ginny" Haines is the first woman in 40 years to lead Ocean County Government, and only the second in history – Hazel Gluck was the first – to serve on the five-member freeholder board since it was established in 1850.



Freeholder Haines, Freeholder Bartlett Jr., and County Counsel Jack Sahradnik
Photo credit: Ocean County Public Information

Haines was appointed to the Board in 2016 (to fill the seat vacated by James F. Lacey), at the suggestion of Freeholders John C. Bartlett and Gerry P. Little, and now serves as Director for 2019, her term expiring Dec. 31. Haines said she was "very honored" that Bartlett and Little had thought of her as the right fit; she had not only the experience, but the name recognition. "The people knew me," she said.

The lifelong Ocean County resident brings years of public service and leadership experience to the board, and has a reputation as one of the hardest working freeholders, rarely taking a weekend off, dedicated to meeting and talking with as many people as possible and learning as much as she can. So what does a freeholder do for fun? Haines confessed she does enjoy the occasional social affair, be it a nice dinner out, a weekend trip or a play or other cultural event in New York City.

She grew up in Lakewood and now lives in Toms River. Her roots in the area go back to the 1600s; her family tree contains such names as Shannon, Horner, Skidmore, Miller, Sculthorpe. She is a member of the Joshua Huddy Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

On her way to the top of the heavily male-dominated Ocean County government, has Haines faced gender bias and discrimination? The majority of the time, she said, no. "Did I feel at times I had to work doubly hard?" That answer is yes. Though, in any profession, she noted, a woman will face an uphill battle to some degree. She admits she has had to speak up a little louder in order to be heard. But in a family of seven (including three older sisters and one younger brother), she had good training.

She has led a civic-minded life since she was 14 years old, helping her parents

Continued on page 3

Freeholder Haines from page 2

with the campaign of Joseph Buckelew and George Buckwald for Lakewood Township Committee. But "I never pictured myself running for office," she said. Her political and professional path started as a student of criminal justice at Ocean County College, having graduated in 1964 from Lakewood High School, where she was inducted into the Lakewood High School Hall of Fame.

She and her ex-husband Dean Haines were both always politically motivated – Dean was mayor of Barnegat by age 23 and Ocean County Clerk at age 30 – "and it's just always continued, and I enjoyed that," she said.

Ginny Haines worked for Freeholder John C. Bartlett Jr. after he was first elected to the board in 1979 and later as a legislative aide for state Sen. Robert W. Singer, R-Ocean.

She has been Ocean County's Republican State Committeewoman since 1985, making her the longest-serving female (the Republicans and Democrats elect one male and one female State Committee person from each county); a Republican National Committeewoman since 2004; and co-chair of the Republican National Committee's Northeast Region since 2013. She also served as an RNC delegate in 2008, 2012 and 2016. At the national party level, she has served as a member of the Ethics, Rules and Site-Selection Committees.

Haines served on the Dover Township Municipal Utilities Authority and was Clerk of the General Assembly from 1987 to 1990. During her clerkship she learned "a tremendous amount," she said, as she was in charge of the bill room and all 40 legislative districts.

"I worked very hard to get the nod to run for legislature (in 1991)," she said – and it paid off. She was the top vote getter in that election and was reelected in 1993. She was a 10th District Assemblywoman from 1992 to 1994, serving as Assistant Majority Whip. As such, Haines helped to establish the "Shore To Please" specialty license plates featuring Barnegat Lighthouse, the revenue from which funds beach cleanups and other environmental projects.

She resigned from the Assembly in 1994 when Gov. Christine Whitman nominated her to become executive director of the New Jersey Lottery. Haines was a speaker and mentor for the Christine Todd Whitman Excellence in Public Service Series.

In 2002 she served on the Toms River (formerly Dover) Township Committee.

Throughout the years, she has worked with the Jersey Shore Council of Boy Scouts, the Monmouth Ocean Foodbank, the Ocean County Heart Association, the United Way; she is an active member of the Rotary Club of Toms River, the Toms River Student Loan Fund Board and the Advisory Council for Big Brothers Big Sisters.

Among her many awards are the Distinguished Citizen Award, and the Loyal Buffalo Award from the Jersey Shore Council of Boy Scouts, and the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Ocean County Girl Scouts; Citizen of the Year by the National Association of Alcohol and Drug Abuse;

Continued on page 4

Freeholder Haines from page 3



Freeholder Bartlett, Architect Paul Barlo and Freeholder Virginia E. Haines.
Photo credit: John C. Bartlett, Jr. Collection

Citizen of the Year by the Lakewood Chamber of Commerce; New Jersey Law Enforcement Association Recognition; and she was named a Paul Harris Fellow and a Melvin Jones Fellow.

As Freeholder Director, she heads up the Department of Parks and Recreation and the Ocean County Natural Lands Trust Fund Advisory Committee and co-chairs the Office of Engineering with John P. Kelly; she also acts as liaison to Ocean County College; the Department of Information Technology; the Advisory Commission on the Status of Women; the Southern New Jersey Freeholders Association; the state Transportation Planning Authority; and the Local Advisory Committee on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse.

Haines works with Parks and Rec department staff to take care of the county's 27 park sites, including two golf courses, sports field complexes, off-leash dog parks, and general recreational areas, along with its wide-ranging recreation programs.

The Ocean County Natural Lands Trust Fund, established in 1997, has acquired and preserved almost 35,000 acres of environmentally sensitive lands and farmlands, with many more applications under review. In 2018, Ocean County purchased and preserved the Forked River Mountains in Lacey Township – about 8,000 acres of open space.

As liaison to Ocean County College, Haines is passionate about high-quality, affordable education and works with the college on various projects, championing the OCC Foundation as board chair. The Foundation gives $600,000 a year in scholarships and sponsors athletics and international trips, with the help of private donors and successful fundraising events.

Her work on the OCC Foundation board is some of her most meaningful, as she feels strongly about making education accessible. OCC is the premier community college in the state, she said, had a 12 percent increase in enrollment last year and is still expanding. Thanks to its partnership with Kean University, OCC makes a four-year education for under $40,000 possible.

Among the biggest challenges Ocean County faces, in Haines' view, is rapid growth and development. Land preservation is another tough but important issue.

"When I was growing up, it was a summer county," she said. She has witnessed major changes in 70 years, and government doesn't always work fast enough to keep up. Even getting a simple traffic light installed is a long, expensive process, she said.

Continued on page 5

Freeholder Haines from page 4

Of course, on personal level, the opioid crisis is the biggest problem plaguing Ocean County residents, she added. She is proud of the work the Prosecutor's Office has done and continues to do to tackle the complex, multi-layered problem with no easy solutions. The anti-overdose drug NARCAN has helped to reduce the number of overdose deaths in the county, she said, and law enforcement is getting tougher on holding drug dealers responsible.



Freeholder Haines presents an award at the 2016 Salute. Photo credit: Ocean County Public Relations

But there are a number of things the county gets right, she said – e.g., lowering the tax rate and maintaining a AAA bond rating, by avoiding foolish spending; and offering services such as OceanRide and meals on wheels for veterans and seniors, of whom Ocean County has the largest population in the state. The county is proud to call itself home to Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, the only joint base in the country, and one that serves important military and economic functions within the county, she added.

Looking to the future, Haines said the freeholders "have a path, and that has been set." A value the board members share is a long-range vision with built-in contingency plans, all the while staying open to new ways of doing things. You can't just plan one year at a time, she said, but more like 15 to 20 years down the road. And Ocean County is still growing.

Because New Jersey has municipal, county and state levels of government, Haines explained, in some ways the freeholders are stuck in the middle, because they can't tell the towns how to do their zoning and planning. Ocean County has 33 towns and 620 miles of roadway. Freeholders are responsible for departments and agencies that handle infrastructure, law enforcement, and a multitude of other services. They are tasked with creating and managing a budget that maintains a high quality of life and providing necessary services for residents while staying within the 2 percent spending cap.

Well-considered planning is how, when Superstorm Sandy struck, for example, the county was able to step in and provide disaster cleanup assistance to municipalities without having to borrow a dime from anyone. "The freeholders were the only government agency to be able to do that," Haines said. "It's a tribute to how the freeholders work together to do that."

The board meets four times a month at the Hooper Avenue Administration Building, and all meetings are open to the public, but only the first and third allow for public comments.