West Windsor's Cathy Archibald reflects on nearly three decades as town clerk

By Aaron Rubin
Standard Correspondent

Cathy Archibald never imagined that she would work in municipal government, let alone put in nearly three decades of service with her hometown of West Windsor. She remembers, "I didn't think I'd win, but I did. Different townspeople asked me to run and I said, 'Sure, I'll try it.' I've never worked in government before. But I said 'I 'll try it,' and I got elected," she said. "I wouldn't have even thought about it then if people hadn't said, 'We need somebody in there. Why don't you run?'"

She was surprised when she was elected to the position, but her first election has led to 29 years of service as West Windsor's town clerk, a position she will be saying goodbye to at the end of this year.

The reasons for why she was encouraged to run for town clerk are the same reasons she has remained in the position. She is very familiar with West Windsor and its people, having lived there her entire life, and possesses a strong work ethic. She says the values of consistency, discipline, and thoroughness were instilled in her at an early age.

"My folks are always hard working, and growing up on a farm you just always had something to do. You didn't have time to just sit around and do nothing," Achibald said. "I've worked since I was 14, I had a job at 16, and when I graduated [from high school] on a Friday, I started work full-time on Monday. A lot of times I had two jobs, full time and part time. And if you're going to do something, do it completely and do a good job."

She's never had an issue with working long hours or procrastination. She says that if the work is right in front of you, it's asking to be done right then and there. "If it's time to quit and I'm almost done, I stay and finish it. Even if it's a half an hour down the road, I'm not going to leave it for tomorrow when I could finish it today," she said. "Don't put off till tomorrow what you can do today."

Serving in a single position for almost 30 years does not come without big changes in how that position's responsibilities shift with technology and new townspeople. Archibald said that in recent years, she's performed land use records and tax filing mostly online, and the process for acquiring marriage licenses has changed.

"If you lived in Vermont, you had to buy [a license] in the town you lived in. Now you can go to any town clerk and buy them. Where [people] are getting married, [they] go to that town to buy them."

Archibald admits that she is not a big fan of these types of changes, and that they created a greater workload for herself and other town clerks in recent years. But all of that is still manageable with persistence and dedication to the work.

West Windsor highway foreman Mike Spackman can attest to Archibald's gregariousness, knowledge of the town, and her commitment to getting stuff done. "She knows all the important parts of the town to run that office," Spackman said. "She's a salaried person and she's there to do a 32 hour work week, and she's there for upwards of 45-50 every week just trying to get stuff done. She's always doing the best job she can for the town."

Former West Windsor Selectboard chair Glenn Seward has known Archibald since their childhoods. He also recognizes Archibald's strong work ethic, having interacted with her at town hall.

"I can unequivocally say West Windsor was very lucky to have Cathy in the town hall. Working with Cathy through some challenging times, such as tropical storm Irene [and] other such circumstances made me appreciate her dedication to the Town of West Windsor," said Seward. "Who would have thought when I was attending Albert Bridge School in the late 60s, our paths would cross again in the Story Memorial Hall!"

Even with lots of work to plough through, it did not prevent Archibald from enjoying the best part of being town clerk: "Meeting all kinds of people: the lawyers, the title searchers, the appraisers, townspeople," she said.

Archibald's knowledge of West Windsor and commitment to getting to know her colleagues and neighbors resonated on a personal level with friend Deb Shearer. "When I moved to West Windsor over 25 years ago, I went to the town hall for some reason — possibly to register my dog — and since the first time I met her, Cathy has always known who I was and called me by name. I chalked it up to small town Vermont, but since then I realized it was Cathy," said Shearer. "From that first interaction, I have felt a part of West Windsor. I know I will miss her when she retires!"

Friend Ted Siegler sees that Archibald "represented a true link to the past of West Windsor, having grown up in West Windsor and being the daughter of the long-time constable, Ralph Johnson," he said. "This gave Cathy a perspective on West Windsor that was very valuable to those of us who moved here from somewhere else and made West Windsor our home. She was a valuable and hard working member of the town office and will certainly be missed by all of us going forward."

Archibald said her primary reason behind the decision to retire was a reluctance to endure another stressful election season. She said it's not easy dealing with election-related business — ballots, paperwork, and registration — all while looking after your own campaign. But to Spackman's point, Archibald was always willing to put in the long hours spent on election nights and to get right back into working until completion.

"If I'm not done by one-thirty or two in the morning, I will put everything away and I'll go home and then I come back at seven [a.m.]. I've got a couple of hours of shut-eye….It was a tough year last November, and I just said 'I'm done.' I hung in there and I did everything that had to be done, but I don't want to do another one," she said. "I like working with the public and I've met so, so many people. I'm really going to miss seeing everybody, but it's time that I stepped down."

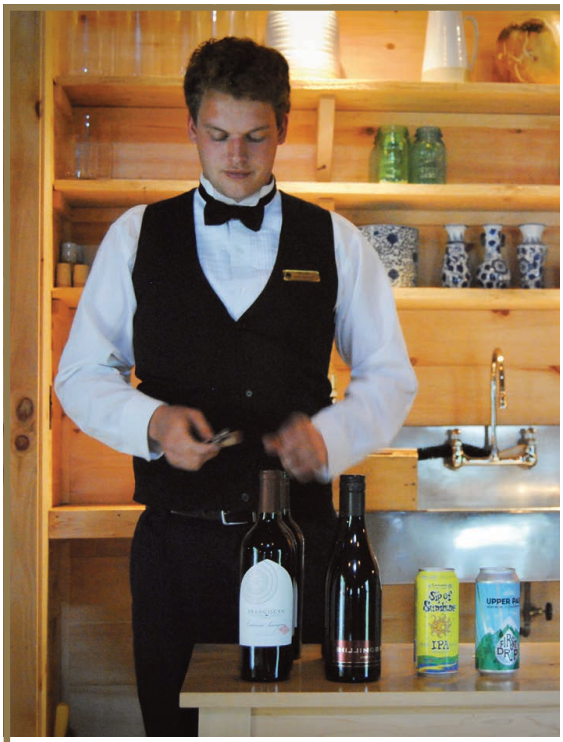


Longtime West Windsor town clerk Cathy Archibald is retiring at the end of the year after 29 years of service. Marcella Barrows Photo

Archibald says she's looking forward to the next stage of life, adding, "I'm not home much between taking care of my mother and working and meetings at night, I just want to enjoy my home."

One of the things she is looking forward to is catching up on the many books she wants to read, including her collection of works by Danielle Steel. "I've got about seven or eight of hers. I buy them as they come out and I'm backlogged by about seven or eight. I want to get caught up on those," Archibald said. She said she would also love to travel and has considered going to Alaska and visiting her brother in Nevada.

Wherever her retirement takes her, Spackman knows it will be difficult to replace the hardworking Archibald. "It'll probably take three people to replace her!"



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