

Adult services director remembered for drive

Lauren Boyer and Anne Danahy

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Bob Ott, the director of Centre County Adult Services who was known for his dedication to helping those in need and his ability to bring different organizations together, died Tuesday after a period of illness. He was 60.



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He is survived by his wife, Sue, of State College, and two children, Adrienne and Devin.

In 1979, Ott began working for Centre County and was behind the start of the Adult Services office, which helps adults ages 18 to 59.

Some attribute his knack for helping the needy to his upbringing in a Johnstown housing project.

“He understood what the clients he worked with were experiencing, because he, himself, had experienced it,” said County Commissioner Jon Eich. “That gave him a huge heart.”

Terry Watson, former director of Centre County Children and Youth Services, knew Ott since his first

job with the county as a Youth Services planner.

He jokingly nicknamed Ott “Mr. Detail,” because of his colleague’s thorough pursuit of every task he was assigned.

“His heart was in it,” Watson said. “Everything was planned and implemented to the nth degree. He did everything in an organized, methodical detailed fashion, but didn’t let the concrete stuff get in the way of the people he was serving.”

County Administrator Denise Elbell said that Ott had a network throughout the county that enabled him to help people any time of day or night or on holidays or weekends.

That included finding places for families to stay when their homes burned down and obtaining assistance for people who needed help paying their bills.

“He definitely served the people. That’s what he was about. He put everybody before himself,” Elbell said. “That was Bob. He cared about people. He wanted to help people.”

Elbell said people from outside of Centre County looking for help would call Ott because they heard how helpful he was.

“He was the person that knew everything,” said Carol Smith, director of Centre County Children and Youth Services. “If you needed to find services, and you weren’t sure what was available, you called Bob.”

Adult Services helps low-income adults and those with disabilities get support services.

Along with heading that department, Ott served on a range of committees and organizations.

He volunteered for Toys for Tots, helped start a heating fuel bank to assist residents in winter months, and participated in the Centre County Affordable Housing Coalition. He also was involved with Interfaith Mission, the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, Community Safety Net, FaithCentre, and the Salvation Army of Centre County.

“Probably only Bob knew how many things he was involved in,” said Jane Taylor, director of the Centre County Office of Aging.

Taylor called Ott the “ultimate collaborator” and “a gentleman in the true sense of the world.”

“He’s always simply been a very diplomatic, firm negotiator of bringing people together and moving us forward,” said Tammy Gentzel, executive director of Centre County United Way.

Gentzel, the former director of Community Help Centre, knew Ott for 17 years.

“I would say that the people of this county have lost a true advocate and a true friend,” she added. “It’s going to be hard to continue collaborations without him being at the table.”

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