

# Cover Story

## Q&A with 2013 MTA President Denny Olson

**Denny Olson, Breitung Charter Township** (Dickinson Co.) supervisor, has nothing but high hopes for the future of township government. And as 2013 MTA president, Olson intends to help townships strengthen their role in helping to drive Michigan back to prosperity and aims to help inspire today's leaders to help cultivate the leaders of tomorrow. After all, Olson notes, "A good leader creates new leaders."

Olson was elected president at the MTA Annual Meeting, held Jan. 25 during the 2013 MTA Annual Educational Conference & Expo in Detroit, and is looking toward his year at the helm of the Association with hopes that officials will work together to better their communities.

A veteran of the Vietnam Conflict, Olson's ties to his community, his state and his country run deep. A native of the township where he has served as supervisor for a decade, Olson lives by the mantra that "the world is run by those who show up." Deeply vested in his region, Olson runs a log trucking business and has been involved in the logging industry for decades. He also owns and operates a gravel pit, and serves on the boards of several regional logging organizations.

Olson recently sat down with the Michigan Township News to reflect on his experiences that have led him to lead one of the largest municipal associations in the state, as well as what he sees when he looks to the future for MTA and for townships.



Olson

### What are your goals as MTA president, and for townships as a whole, this year?

I look at MTA as being a leading association in the state—and one that people look to for how to model the way that they do business. As president, I would like to see this continue, with communication and harmony across the state. This is what MTA stands for—with purpose and vision for townships and for Michigan.

### How can township officials further engage residents in the local government process?

It starts with meetings with the local boards, and getting residents aware and involved in the process. Township officials must always strive to be transparent, as far as hearing from residents via surveys and local "town hall"-type meetings.

### What role do townships play in restoring Michigan to prosperity?

We need to be ready to work with people to create jobs. We should start with jobs that are here and keeping Michigan going and keep those businesses healthy. If they are successful, that will be a magnet to draw new business and give incentive to keep more businesses in the state. This will bring Michigan back to prosperity.

### When you look into the future—25 or 50 years, what do you see for township government?

One word: Stronger. There are two types of people: players and pretenders. Players are going to show up and get involved, and pretenders have a lot to say but that's it. Township officials will continue to remain active players in the future of this state.

### What advice do you have for township officials in how to achieve quality leadership and service in their communities?

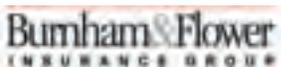
God gave us two ears and only one mouth—and a big part of being a township official is listening. We base our actions and leadership on those principals. We must build on that philosophy and put it into action to do our duties in our communities.

### What in your personal and professional experience prepared you to serve as MTA's leadership?

I was drafted into the Army [during the Vietnam Conflict], and that was a two-year process of growing up, which

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got me out of the Breitung Township cocoon that I didn't know I was in. I am the owner/operator of my own business, which has really helped me with leadership skills. I have also been involved in different trade associations, which has helped me to learn a lot.

The biggest thing is that I rely on people and building relationships to get the job done. People are very important to me, and I can't make this happen without the people around me. It's this team effort that I rely on to be president of MTA.

**Why/how did you get started in township government?**

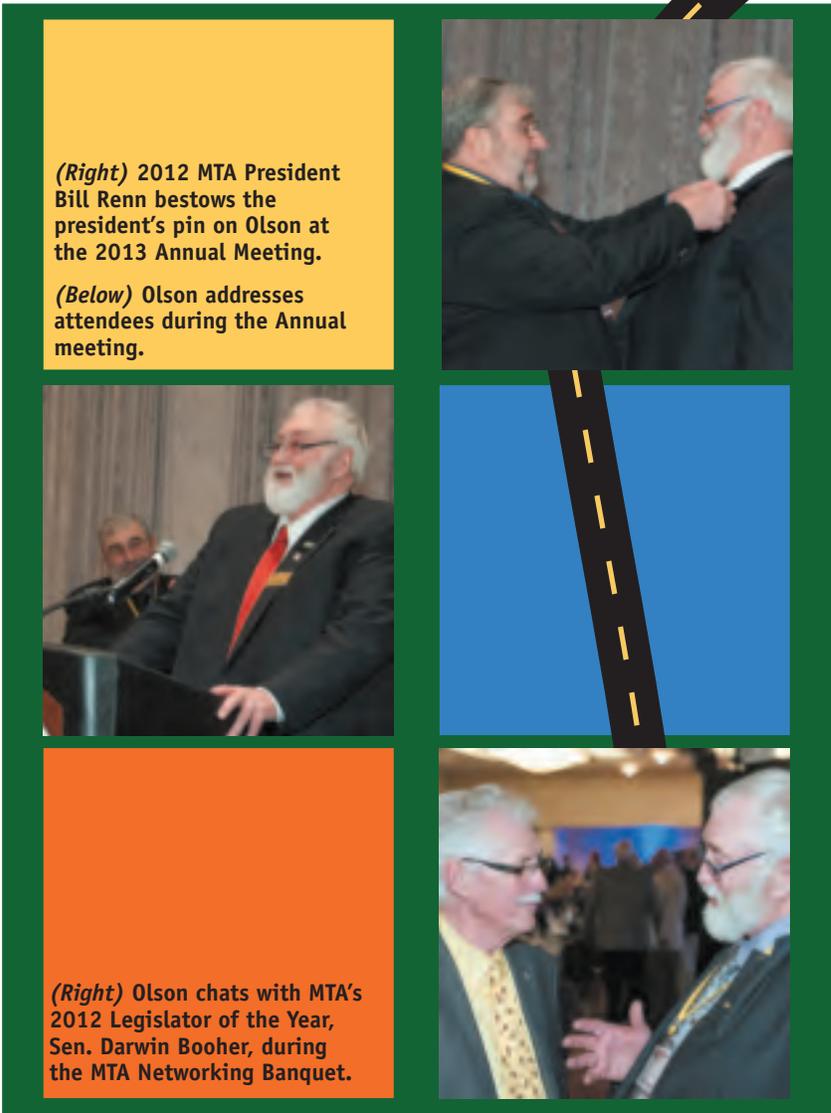
I have been involved in working with the Legislature for the last 30-plus years. After our township's supervisor resigned, my friend and fellow log trucker (now state Sen.) Tom Casperson told then-Speaker of the House Rick Johnson about the vacancy. Johnson urged me to put my name in [to fill the vacancy], and I was appointed in January 2003.

I give credit to my township board for all their efforts, and MTA for all their educational programs and how they help township officials do their duties in local communities. Being a township official has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my life.

My American government teacher would roll over in his grave if he could see my involvement in township government now and how people have accepted my role in government. Teachers like that—who are willing to work with you—make all the difference.

**Upon completion of your term, what would you like your legacy to be?**

This is not about one person; it's not about the MTA Board, the staff, or me, as president. We all have to come



*(Right)* 2012 MTA President Bill Renn bestows the president's pin on Olson at the 2013 Annual Meeting.

*(Below)* Olson addresses attendees during the Annual meeting.

*(Right)* Olson chats with MTA's 2012 Legislator of the Year, Sen. Darwin Booher, during the MTA Networking Banquet.

to together—as 6,500-plus township officials, as a community—striving to rejuvenate Michigan back to prosperity. I would like to see township officials who strive to build relationships to make townships prosper and Michigan a better place to live, work and play.

**Who are your personal heroes?**

My dad, John Maxwell (a motivational speaker), Joe Gibbs (a former football coach and NASCAR championship team

owner) and Tony Dungy (a professional football player and NFL coach and commentator). All are Christian men, and I learned a lot from how they live their everyday lives.

Hundreds of people have nurtured me along the way to get me here today. People have been so good to me. For me, to be MTA president is unbelievable. I love this stuff.

Silver



Bronze



# Introducing MTA's newly elected Board of Directors

Elected by the membership and installed at MTA's 2013 Annual Meeting, held Jan. 25 in Detroit, these new officers and directors are committed to helping township officials serve their communities more effectively as they promote MTA's mission of supporting township government. MTA district directors serve a four-year term on the MTA Board. Their role is to:

- Act as a liaison between the membership and the MTA Board and staff.
- Assist in formulating Association policies and supporting legislation that positively promotes township government.
- Seek input, ideas and areas of concern from members.
- Attend county chapter meetings in their district to report the policies and positions adopted by the MTA Board. At MTA Board meetings, directors report on member ideas.

Take this opportunity to locate your district director on the following pages, and get to know him or her on a first-name basis. Your director is your voice on the MTA Board. We look forward to hearing from you!

## 2013 MTA Executive Committee



**Denny Olson, President**  
Supervisor, Breitung Charter Township  
(Dickinson Co.)

- Elected to MTA Board in 2005
- Appointed supervisor in 2003
- Michigan Association of Timbermen board member, 1987-present, and past president
- Great Lakes Timber Professionals Association executive committee member and past president, 1988-present
- Michigan Forest Resource Alliance member, during the late '80s and 2004-2005



**Doug Merchant, First Vice President**  
Supervisor, Arcada Township (Griatiot Co.)

- Elected to the MTA Board in 2006
- Elected supervisor in 1987; trustee, 1985-1987
- Assessor for Arcada, Pine River and Bethany Townships
- Served on numerous boards and committees, including Griatiot County Farm Bureau, Ithaca High School Future Farmers of America, and Griatiot County Fair Committee and GIS Committee
- Member of the Ithaca Lions



**Linda Preston, Second Vice President**  
Supervisor, Pokagon Township (Cass Co.)

- Elected to MTA Board in 2005
- Elected supervisor in 2004; clerk, 1984-2004
- Southwest Michigan Planning Commission, 1999-present; vice chair, 2008-2010; chair, 2010-2012; secretary, 2013
- Michigan Association of Regions, 2004-present
- 4-H Leader, 1978-present; 4-H key leader, 2002-present



**Doug Mansfield, Treasurer**  
Supervisor, Union Township (Grand Traverse Co.)

- Elected to MTA Board in 2005
- Appointed supervisor in 1995; trustee, 1993-1995; planning commissioner, 1991-1993
- Rural Fire Board member, 1995-present
- Grand Traverse County Board of Public Works chair, 1999-2007



**Diane F. Randall, Secretary**  
Supervisor, Roscommon Township  
(Roscommon Co.)

- Elected to MTA Board in 2005
- Appointed supervisor in 1997
- Level II assessor since 2002
- Houghton Lake Sewer Authority chair, 1997-present
- Houghton Lake Building Agency Board member, 1997-present
- Houghton Lake Ambulance Authority chair; member, 2004-2012
- Emergency Medical Services Coordination Committee member within the Michigan Department of Community Health
- Aquatic Invasive Species Advisory Council member



**Ken Gauthier, Member-at-large**  
Supervisor, Sanborn Township (Alpena Co.)

- Elected to MTA Board in 2005
- Elected supervisor in 1986; township assessor, 2003-present; zoning board of appeals member, 1976-1986
- Negwegon-Rockport and Thompson Harbor State Park Advisory Committee member
- Alpena County Intergovernmental Council member
- Alpena County Senior Citizens Committee member and former chair, 2004-present



**Bill Renn, MTA Immediate Past President**  
Supervisor, Chandler Township (Huron Co.)

- Elected to MTA Board in 2001
- Appointed supervisor in 1989
- Huron County MTA Chapter chair
- Cross Lutheran Church member

## District 1

Gogebic, Houghton, Keweenaw and Ontonagon Counties



### Debbie Aubin, Treasurer

**Calumet Charter Township** (Houghton Co.)

- Elected to MTA Board in 2012
- Elected treasurer in 1996
- Involved in area theatre groups, including the Calumet Theatre Company and Calumet Players Community Theatre

## District 2

Baraga, Dickinson, Iron and Marquette Counties



### William Luetzow, Supervisor

**Richmond Township** (Marquette Co.)

- Elected to MTA Board in 2013
- Elected supervisor in 2000
- Township firefighter for 34 years, 10 years as fire chief
- Marquette County Township Association president
- U.P. Fire Chiefs Association past president
- U.P. Volunteer Firemen's Association past president
- Marquette County 911 Policy Committee member

## District 3

Alger, Delta and Menominee Counties



### Peter Kleiman, Supervisor

**Harris Township** (Menominee Co.)

- Elected to MTA Board in 2011
- Elected supervisor in 1988
- Township assessor for 20 years
- Menominee County Farm Bureau
- President, FarmFirst Dairy Cooperative

## District 4

Chippewa, Luce, Mackinac and Schoolcraft Counties



### Marilyn Strickland, Treasurer

**Newton Township** (Mackinac Co.)

- Elected to MTA Board in 2009
- Elected treasurer in 1984
- Newton Township building inspector, 1979-1984; Newton Township Board of Review member, 1979-1984
- Newton Township firefighter, 1982-1988
- Garfield Township Ambulance Corps member, 1983-1997
- Former emergency medical technician for Newton, Garfield, Hendricks and Hudson Townships

## District 5

Charlevoix, Cheboygan and Emmet Counties



### Harold Koviak, Supervisor

**Burt Township** (Cheboygan Co.)

- Elected to MTA Board in 2013
- Elected supervisor in 2002, trustee, 2000-2002
- Burt Township zoning administrator, 1992-2000
- Michigan High School Athletic Association basketball referee for 32 years

## District 6

Antrim, Crawford, Kalkaska and Otsego Counties



### William White, Supervisor

**Elk Rapids Township** (Antrim Co.)

- Elected to MTA Board in 2013
- Elected supervisor in 1988
- Township firefighter, 1982-1994
- Antrim County Conservation District member, 1987-present

## District 7

Alcona, Alpena, Montmorency, Oscoda and Presque Isle Counties

### Ken Gauthier, Supervisor

**Sanborn Township** (Alpena Co.)

See page 16 for more on Gauthier.

## District 8

Benzie, Grand Traverse, Leelanau and Manistee Counties

### Doug Mansfield, Supervisor

**Union Township** (Grand Traverse Co.)

Turn to page 16 for more on Mansfield.

## District 9

Clare, Missaukee, Osceola and Wexford Counties



### Steven Ebels, Clerk

**Clam Union Township** (Missaukee Co.)

- Elected to MTA Board in 2005
- Elected clerk in 1997
- Assistant fire chief, 1984-1996; volunteer firefighter, 1976-present
- Prosper Christian Reformed Church council elder

## District 10

Arenac, Iosco, Ogemaw and Roscommon Counties

### Diane F. Randall, Supervisor

**Roscommon Township** (Roscommon Co.)

Turn to page 16 for more on Randall.

**District 11**

Lake, Mason and Oceana Counties

**Connie Cargill, Treasurer****Golden Township** (Oceana Co.)

- Elected to MTA Board in 2013
- Appointed treasurer in 1995, previously served as deputy treasurer
- Oceana County Parks and Recreation Committee member

- 4-H leader and member of the 4-H Horse Development Committee
- Mason County Saddle Club member

**District 12**

Isabella, Mecosta and Newaygo Counties

**Yulanda Bellingar, Clerk****Morton Township** (Mecosta Co.)

- Elected to MTA Board in 2009
- Elected clerk in 2008
- 2011 Township Governance Academy graduate
- Mecosta County Economic Development Corporation Executive Board treasurer, 2012-present

- Mecosta County Chamber of Commerce Board member, 2012-present
- Mecosta County Community Foundation board member, 2002-present

**District 13**

Bay, Gladwin and Midland Counties

**Dennis Bragiell, Supervisor****Kawkawlin Township** (Bay Co.)

- Elected to MTA Board in 2013
- Elected supervisor in 2008
- Bay City school district volunteer, 1989-present
- Bay City Western Booster Club treasurer, 1993-present

- "Voice of the Warriors" football and wrestling announcer, 1995-present

**District 14**

Huron and Tuscola Counties

**Larry Krohn, Supervisor****Oliver Township** (Huron Co.)

- Elected to MTA Board in 2012
- Elected supervisor in 1982, served as trustee for one year
- Past secretary of Huron County MTA Chapter
- Member of Knights of Columbus

**District 15**

Kent, Muskegon and Ottawa Counties

**Joel Hondorp, Clerk****Byron Township** (Kent Co.)

- Appointed to MTA Board in 2012
- Elected clerk in 2000; trustee, 1996-2000
- Past president of the Michigan Association of Municipal Clerks (MAMC) Board of Directors
- 2010 MAMC Clerk of the Year

- Byron Days Festival Committee member
- South Kent Rotary member

**District 16**

Gratiot, Ionia and Montcalm Counties

**Doug Merchant, Supervisor****Arcada Township** (Gratiot Co.)*See page 16 for more on Merchant.***District 17**

Genesee, Saginaw and Shiawassee Counties

**Joanne Boehler, Treasurer****James Township** (Saginaw Co.)

- Elected to MTA Board in 2005
- Elected treasurer in 1996; deputy treasurer, 1976-1996
- Saginaw County Township Officers Association president, 2008-2009

- Saginaw Area Local Treasurers Association co-founder

**District 18**

Sanilac and St. Clair Counties

**Bill Deater, Supervisor****Grant Township** (St. Clair Co.)

- Elected to MTA Board in 2011
- Elected supervisor in 2004; board of review member since 1999
- Member of the Grant Township Volunteer Fire Department for 40 years

- St. Clair County Supervisors Association member and past president
- St. Clair County Central Dispatch township representative

**District 19**

Allegan, Barry and Kalamazoo Counties

**Jeffrey Sorensen, Supervisor****Cooper Charter Township** (Kalamazoo Co.)

- Elected to MTA Board in 2008
- Elected supervisor in 2000
- Cooper Charter Township fire department member for 20 years; assistant fire chief, 1988-2000
- Kalamazoo County Council of Governments president, 2006-2007

- Kalamazoo Area Transportation Study member, 2000-present
- Kalamazoo Regional Water and Wastewater Commission vice chair, 2000-present

**District 20**  
Clinton, Eaton and Ingham Counties



**Patti Jo Schafer, Supervisor**

**Eagle Township** (Clinton Co.)

- Elected to MTA Board in 2013
- Elected supervisor in 2008, treasurer, 1996-2008
- St. Michael Finance Council, 1986-2006; Tuition Reduction Incentive Program director, 1992-current

- Grand Ledge Bull Pen Club, 2009-current
- Volunteer for various festivals in Lansing's Old Town

**District 21**  
Lapeer, Macomb and Oakland Counties



**Pauline Bennett, Clerk**

**Addison Township** (Oakland Co.)

- Elected to MTA Board in 2009
- Elected clerk in 1996; township planning commissioner, 1992-1996
- Oxford Addison Youth Assistance board member, 1998-present

- International Institute of Municipal Clerks Certified Municipal Clerk, 2003
- Master citizen planner, 2007

**District 22**  
Berrien, Cass and Van Buren Counties

**Linda Preston, Supervisor**

**Pokagon Township** (Cass Co.)  
*See page 16 for more on Preston.*

**District 23**  
Branch, Calhoun and St. Joseph Counties



**Donald Rogers, Treasurer**

**Coldwater Township** (Branch Co.)

- Elected to MTA Board in 2013
- Elected treasurer in 2000; trustee, 1988-2000
- Township planning commissioner, 1995-2007; water/sewer superintendent, 1995-present

- Township fire committee member, 1988-1994

**District 24**  
Hillsdale, Jackson and Lenawee Counties



**Al Boggs, Supervisor**

**Rome Township** (Lenawee Co.)

- Elected to MTA Board in 2010
- Elected supervisor in 2000
- 2008 Township Governance Academy graduate
- Past member, Michigan State University Extension's Rural Committee

- Lenawee County GIS Policy Committee township representative

**District 25**  
Livingston, Monroe, Washtenaw and Wayne Counties



**Lance Schuhmacher, Trustee**

**Oceola Township** (Livingston Co.)

- Elected to MTA Board in 2013
- Elected trustee in 2001
- Genoa/Oceola, and Marion, Howell, Oceola and Genoa Sewer & Water Authority representative

- Former Thompson Lake Water Board representative
- Assistant Troop 367 Scoutmaster, 2004-present

# Learning to ‘Chart a New Course’ at MTA’s 2013 Annual Educational Conference & Expo

Change was in the air at MTA’s 60th Annual Educational Conference & Expo, held Jan. 22-25, 2013, at the Detroit Marriott Renaissance Center, where township officials learned to “Chart a New Course”—for themselves, their township and the state as a whole.

At the Conference’s Opening Session, 2012 MTA President **Bill Renn** welcomed officials—and urged them to embrace a new direction in leading their townships.

“It is time to chart a new course and surge ahead in a new direction,” he said. “For those of you who were newly elected this November, serving as a township official is a new experience ... one that will be both exciting and, at times, overwhelming, as you face new challenges along the way.

“For those returning to office for another term, you realize that it’s a whole new world out there. It’s no longer business as usual, and you need a new roadmap—one with directions on how to drive your township toward a more sustainable future.”

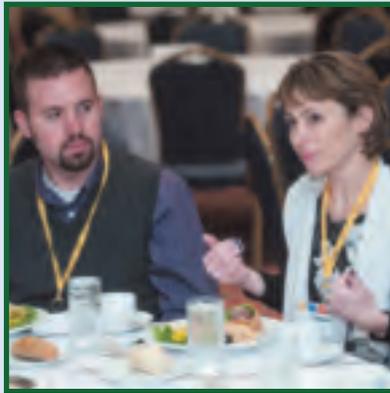
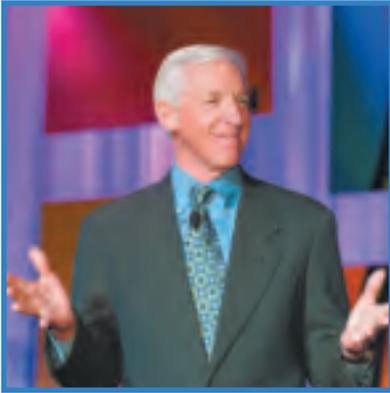
Throughout the week, MTA gave attendees tools and inspiration to help to chart that new path for today’s changing times. Attendees enjoyed:

- A full slate of educational sessions—more than 70 in all—including a track for newly elected officials, along with a myriad of offerings for seasoned officials.
- A 100-plus booth Expo, with vendors offering information on products and services to help Michigan townships run more efficiently.
- The MTA Networking Banquet, which included recognition of two “Legislators of the Year,” Sens. Darwin Booher (R-Osceola Twp.) and Tom Casperson (R-Fremont Twp.), and presentation of a Lifetime Service Award to Michigan State University Professor Emeritus Kenneth VerBurg (*see page 22*). Following the awards ceremony, attendees enjoyed a musical journey celebrating six decades of hits, performed by Detroit-based Fifty Amp Fuse.
- The Association’s Annual Meeting, including the election of MTA’s 2013 president, **Denny Olson, Breitung Charter Township** (Dickinson Co.) supervisor (*see page 14*), new officers and District directors (*see page 16*), along with adoption of the 2013 MTA Policy Platform (*see page 36*).



Learn.







Michigan State University Professor Emeritus Kenneth VerBurg accepts MTA's Lifetime Service Award as MTA Executive Director Larry Merrill looks on.

## MTA honors Ken VerBurg for his contributions to township government

At the MTA Networking Banquet, held Jan. 24 during the Conference, MTA presented its Lifetime Service Award to Kenneth VerBurg, a professor emeritus from the Michigan State University Extension State and Local Government Program. VerBurg is the author of *Managing the Modern Michigan Township*—long considered one of the fundamental manuals for township officials.

"Professor Ken VerBurg has devoted a lifetime to improving local government in Michigan," said Larry Merrill, MTA executive director. "Beginning with his master's thesis on the driving forces of municipal cooperation and continuing with writing multiple books on county and township government, he has played a pivotal role in helping local government officials better understand their roles and responsibilities. MTA has conferred on Professor VerBurg its Lifetime Service Award in appreciation of all of his work on behalf of [MSU's] mission to make a positive difference in improving Michigan local government."

At MSU, VerBurg was a professor in the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Department of Resource Development, and Community Development Programs for the Institute for Community Development. He also was associate dean for the Lifelong Education Program. Previously, he was business manager at Grand Valley State University, and he also worked at the Michigan Department of Education. In 2010, he served as chair of the State Boundary Commission.

"I am thrilled to be honored for a lifetime of research and education in local government," VerBurg said. "I have truly enjoyed my work."

*Purchase a copy of VerBurg's Managing the Modern Michigan Township from MTA at [www.michigantownships.org](http://www.michigantownships.org), or call (517) 321-6467. Cost is \$35 for MTA members; \$51 for non-members, plus shipping.*



## Sing-a-long video shares the pride of Michigan's townships

At the Conference's Opening Session on Wednesday, Jan. 23, MTA debuted a new video celebrating the pride of townships.

The video, produced by noted videographer Rob Bliss, highlights Michigan's 1,240 townships and includes footage shot in more than 21 townships. The video reflects the lifestyles of township residents, along with a look at the types of programs and services that townships provide both to their residents as well as businesses that locate there.

"We really wanted to tell townships' story in a contemporary way," said Larry Merrill, MTA executive director. "For decades, we have known that townships have been the economic engine of Michigan's prosperity and that the township form of government delivers the best value for local services. However, until now, we haven't expressed the pride and spirit that exists amongst those individuals who live or work in a Michigan township.

"Our new sing-a-long offers that insight and helps express the feelings that so many Michiganders have about the place that they call home."

To view the video, visit [www.michigantownships.org](http://www.michigantownships.org). Share the pride by linking to the video from your township's website!