

## MIDDLETOWN

## Search on for new manager

*Two supervisors said they don't favor a big national search for a new manager, at least not to start.*

By **CHRIS ENGLISH**  
STAFF WRITER

Twenty years of stability in the Middletown manager's office has been replaced by a revolving door.

The township supervisors are looking for their third manager in four years after Richard Gestrich announced that he's leaving July 3 to take the same position in Oviedo, Fla., at a starting salary of \$135,000 a year, \$18,000 more than he's making in Middletown.

Gestrich has been manager a little more than two years. John Burke held the position for 20 years before resigning in 2004 and taking the manager's job in New Hope. After Burke left, the assistant township manager, Frank Farry, stepped in as acting manager for nine months before the township hired Stephen Bonczek.

He lasted less than a year before resigning. Parks and Recreation Director Debby Lamanna was acting manager for several months before Gestrich arrived. Now, it's back to search mode again for the supervisors and other township officials.

"I have no idea why all the turnover but I know it's not good for the township and we'd like to find a way to get some stability here," said Supervisor Chuck Thompson.

To increase those chances, the township should advertise for someone in the Delaware Valley with strong local ties who might be less likely to leave in a year or two, he said. Gestrich was township manager in Upper Makefield for 22 years but then spent a year as manager in Jupiter Island, Fla., before coming to Middletown.

"I'd like to find somebody from Pennsylvania familiar with Pennsylvania rules and regulations," Thompson said. "I'd like to get someone from this region or area."

Gestrich will assist in the search for his replacement, Thompson said.

"I believe Rich has been asked to get the word out to people he knows that might be interested," he said. "He was looking so he might know others who are looking."

Supervisors Chairman Robert McMonagle said he doesn't favor a broad national search for a new manager, at least not to start.

"I want to work in concentric circles out from Bucks County and hopefully find someone from Pennsylvania," he said. "I'm not interested in flying people in and paying for hotels and rental cars. If we have to go elsewhere, we will, but we'll start the search locally."

McMonagle said the supervisors haven't discussed who might have to step in as acting manager when Gestrich leaves. Farry won't be available because he left his assistant manager post Friday after resigning over issues with his candidacy for state representative.

The goal is to have a new permanent manager already in place when Gestrich departs, said McMonagle.

"It's a tall order, but I think we can do it," he said.

Gestrich said he's not dissatisfied in Middletown but is simply taking advantage of a great opportunity at significantly higher pay.

"I have nothing negative to say about my time in Middletown," he said. "It's a very dynamic community, but so is Oviedo. I'd say one of the determining factors in my leaving is that Oviedo is very much a growing community, and I'm very experienced in dealing with that from my time in Upper Makefield."

Both Thompson and McMonagle said they probably wouldn't favor offering the new Middletown manager a salary close to what Gestrich will make in Oviedo.

"We have to spend within our budget and I think we can get a good person for about what Rich was making [\$117,000 a year]," Thompson said.

"I think we'll try to stay within the levels that adjacent townships are paying," McMonagle added.

A sampling by the newspaper of townships close to Middletown of roughly similar size showed that Gestrich's salary was higher than most, though he also has a lot more experience than most of those managers or administrators in equivalent positions.

Falls Manager Peter Gray, in that position a little more than a year, makes \$101,000 a year. Bristol Township Managing Director Jeff Bartlett, who's held that position less than a year, makes \$93,840. In Warminster, township Manager Robert Tate earns \$99,750 after slightly more than a year on the job.

On the high end, Lower Makefield's Terry Fedorchak makes \$136,731 after 15 years as township manager. Bensalem Director of Administration William Cmorey makes \$125,000 a year. He's been in that job about a year and a half but in similar administrative posts for 30 years, township officials said.