

Dr. Klein, Mayor Klein: Both Are All in a Day's Work

“**W**hen you're a physician, you're altruistic. You're always looking to do some good for people.” Shawn Klein, MD '99, believes in putting that ethic to work to benefit his community.

Spending most of his day practicing ophthalmology as a cornea and cataract specialist, Dr. Klein felt there was more he could do. So he decided to run for the township council of Livingston, New Jersey, in 2015. Dr. Klein won the election and was unanimously elected mayor by the council members in January 2017 because of the hard work and dedication he had exhibited as a council member.

He decided to throw his hat in the ring because he believes there's a greater good that is served in this kind of role—and because he truly loves the town he grew up in. “You're limited by the number of people you can see in a day as a physician,” Dr. Klein says. “When you get involved in public policy, taking on the work of running a small town, you can touch more people.”

Born in Livingston and graduated

BY LYND A RUDOLPH

from the local high school in 1991, he went on to the University of Pennsylvania and then to Robert Wood Johnson Medical School. His ophthalmic training took him to other points in New Jersey as well as to New York and Chicago. Marriage and parenthood changed things. Dr. Klein and his wife, Cindy, decided to come back to Livingston to raise their children, Jack and Leo. The move also put them closer to family: Dr. Klein's parents, his twin sister, and her family also reside in Livingston. Dr. Klein practices medicine with his father, who is also an ophthalmologist.

Dr. Klein sees a trend in people returning to the area. “Six of my seven closest friends have come back to Livingston,” he says, adding what he believes to be reasons for the town's popularity: “It's a wonderful place—great schools and proximity to New York.” A town of about 30,000 people in southwestern Essex County,

Livingston was named for the first governor of the state, William Livingston. The town's school system has been nationally recognized, and the community has a reputation for volunteerism that has helped it maintain a reputation for giving back.

Livingston has benefited from Dr. Klein's involvement for several years. He served on the Vision 20/20 Committee, which was established with the goal of creating a strategy for the Township of Livingston to improve the quality of life for the community, its residents, and businesses. Dr. Klein was responsible for implementing plans for a shuttle to New York City and holding electronic recycling events. He's a big believer in communities becoming sustainable—particularly ensuring climate security through reduced dependence on fossil fuels. Each year, the town profits from the sale of solar energy while it uses alternative sources. Conserving water is another ecological concern that he's added to his agenda as mayor.

Dr. Klein also helped shepherd in a new facility: a FieldTurf complex featuring a revolutionary type of turf that reportedly provides a safer surface for young athletes than earlier



COURTESY OF SHAWN KLEIN, MD '99

artificial surfaces. In addition, the mayor is hoping to develop an app that anyone in the community can use to access and input information on a smartphone—everything from reporting a pothole that needs repair to getting the latest garbage pickup dates. His motivation isn't just to keep the town updated—it's to keep it a special place.

Dr. Klein's clinical practice has in no way suffered because of his public

“You're limited by the number of people you can see in a day as a physician. When you get involved in public policy, taking on the work of running a small town, you can touch more people.”

— Shawn Klein, MD '99

policy work. He points out that his role as mayor is not a full-time position, since a township manager runs the day-to-day operations under the supervision of the township council. “I love ophthalmology,” he says, adding that he considers it to be a very exciting field—one that's technologically advanced. “There are so many improvements in surgical techniques that are exciting—for example, laser cataract surgery,” says Dr. Klein. “With multifocal implants, near and far vision improvement is now possible.”

He believes that people go into medicine because of their innate intellectual curiosity and because they get joy from learning new things. This can apply to public service as well. “In this public world, once you have your arms around it, you see there's something else to jump into and learn about,” he says. He also suggests that eye surgery is all about problem solving—a skill he also puts to use as mayor.

But in the end, his decision to embrace both a clinical profession and a public life comes down to one thing: “The good you do for people is the reason behind both.” **M**