

The Ironton Tribune

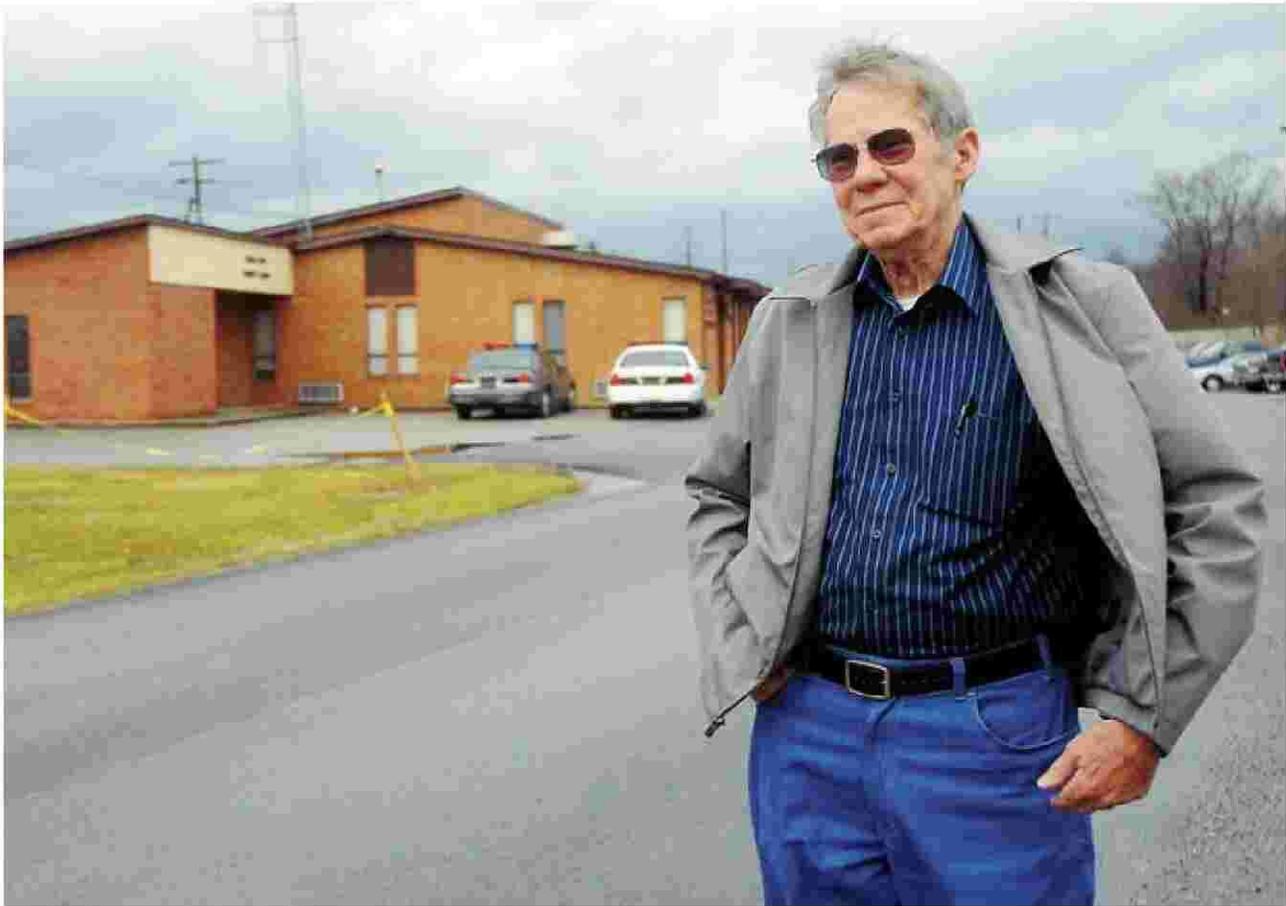


photo by [Jessica St. James](#)

Mayor Bill Gaskin served South Point for 30 years. Gaskin died Friday at the age of 80.

South Point leader called friend to his hometown

By [Benita Heath](#) | The Tribune

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SOUTH POINT — The man villagers called Mr. South Point is being remembered this weekend as family and friends mourn the passing of Mayor William “Bill” Gaskin.

Gaskin, 80, died Friday after an extended illness. His funeral will be at 1 p.m. Wednesday at the First Baptist Church in South Point with visitation from 5 to 8 p.m. Tuesday at the church.

The 8-term mayor and Feesburg native started his political career on the council of his adopted home in 1976. Joining him then was Bob Armstrong, who has remained on council during the Gaskin era.

“He was a real good man to work with,” Armstrong said. “He had the village at heart all the time. People could count on him. They knew they could trust him.”

Working alongside Gaskin for the past 25 years has been village administrator Pat Leighty, who called his boss a man with great clout not only in Lawrence County, but throughout the state.

“Almost everything that has been accomplished in South Point, Bill has had a hand in or it was his idea,” Leighty said. “He had a big hand in getting everything done.”

During the past 10 years, Gaskin was president of the Ohio Municipal League and the Ohio Association of Mayors, as well as serving on the Ohio Public Works Committee, the Lawrence Economic Development Corp. and the Huntington/Ironton Empowerment Zone Committee that established The Point Industrial Park.

“The Ohio Association of Mayors, that is a big organization. When you take cities the size of Toledo and Columbus and the little village of South Point, that says a lot,” Leighty said. “He was thought highly of in the state of Ohio. He had a way with people. He used common sense. He never did anything for himself. It was for the people.

“A lot of politicians, they have a few pet projects they have interest in for personal reasons. He didn’t do that,” Leighty said. “He tried to treat everyone the same.”

Deeply involved in the commercial development of South Point in his 30 years as mayor, Gaskin has been credited with improving the village park, creating a boat ramp park, resurfacing village streets, expanding water and sewer services and developing the U.S. 52 overpass that now bears his name.

For the past five and a half years Dr. Bill Dingus of the LEDC worked with Gaskin in turning the one-time Allied Chemical plant site off County Road 1 into a viable industrial park.

“He was a wonderful partner. From my first day there, he became a chief ally and adviser for whom I had great respect and admiration,” Dingus said. “He always handled everything in a very positive manner. He had such a broad vision for the area. He viewed South Point as having a responsibility to all of the surrounding communities.”

Another longtime friend and civic leader is South Point Fire Chief Richard Stevens who knew Gaskin for three decades starting when they worked on the village sewer project together.

“He was a great friend and a great boss, always fair, always a Christian,” Stevens said.

Gaskin’s influence surpassed generational boundaries as younger leaders of the village also looked to him for guidance and support.

One was David Classing who has served on the village council for the past 12 years and called the mayor “a true friend to the village.”

“He was dedicated to the community,” Classing said. “After he retired, he put a lot of focus on the industrial park. That will be his lasting legacy.”

It was only a few weeks ago when Mark Christian ran into Gaskin at the Snak Shak in South Point and shared dinner. Christian, the assistant superintendent at South Point Schools, grew up with Gaskin’s children.

“He was real accessible. If you had a problem, you could go to him,” Christian said. “He was a big family man. He used to take his daughters to the mayors’ conventions. I respected him and really valued him as a friend. He has always been the mayor.”