

# MUNICIPALITY CLOSE-UP:

## Town of Vernon



**Team Vernon (from l-r): Pete Griffiths, Refuse/Recycling Supervisor; Ron Levesque, Road Foreman; Jeff Schambach, Road Foreman; Mark Dzedzinski, Road Foreman; Robert Kleinhans, Public Works Director; Dwight Ryniewicz, Vehicle and Equipment Supervisor.**

**R**obert “Bob” Kleinhans is not your typical public works director. Prior to being hired by the Town of Vernon in November 2009, he had not served as an assistant to a director, nor had he served as a town engineer, a fleet supervisor or a road or highway foreman – in Vernon or any other municipality. (In fact, his only paid municipal experience was a ten-year stint as a police officer in Far Hills, New Jersey shortly after he graduated from high school.) “Before starting here in the Public Works Department my background was in private real estate development, property management, finance and general contracting,”

says Kleinhans, who settled in Vernon in 1988. “I also served for eight years on the Town Council, so I came to the job knowing a lot about the town, including its public works operations.” Kleinhans pauses and smiles. “All of those years cutting budgets...and now I’m the guy on the other side of the table doing the advocating for the department. It’s been interesting.”

Kleinhans notes that the Vernon Public Works Department does not include engineering and surveying divisions, unlike many Connecticut



municipalities. “Here, Public Works is more of a hands-on service and construction crew,” he says. “My management background and skills actually match up really well with what the department needed...I came to the job with an eye toward making better use of manpower and systems in order to achieve efficiencies, and that’s what I have focused on over the past year.”



As a member of the Town Council, Kleinhans developed a deep understanding of the town budget, an understanding that has gone a long way toward helping his department “do more with less.” Since Kleinhans came on board, for example, the Vernon Public Works Department has implemented an automated refuse collection program, upgraded the town’s transfer station, and refocused its efforts on road maintenance. “In order to launch the automated refuse program, we purchased three automated side loaders, two of which we bought used from the City of Sacramento (CA),” Kleinhans says. “I don’t think we would have been able to make the program work if we had to buy three new trucks. It’s been great...in large part because my fleet supervisor stepped off the edge of the canyon and said, ‘We can make this work.’”

Kleinhans is quick to emphasize that his success to date is the result of having a top-notch staff with a “can-do” attitude. “I have great

supervisors and administrative people with years of experience in Vernon, as well as experience in other municipalities and in the private sector. They aren’t afraid to take on projects that might go out to contract in many other towns in order to get things done more economically.

We just contracted with the Board of Education, for example, to rebuild the parking lot at their central administrative office for \$50,000 less than the next lowest bid.”

Kleinhans continues. “We needed a new rack body truck, but didn’t have the money, so when we bought the automated side loaders, the guys took one of the old recyclers, cut the body off and rebuilt it as a rack body truck.” Kleinhans laughs. “It’s the ugliest rack body truck you’ve ever seen because it’s got a sliding door on one side, but it didn’t cost us anything and we’ll get a good fifteen years out of it.”

Looking ahead, Kleinhans sees as the town’s highest priorities the need to find new and creative ways to keep Vernon streets in good, safe condition, while addressing the needs of an aging fleet and aging town buildings, including school buildings, the maintenance of which Kleinhans is currently managing under a temporary contract with the Vernon Board of Education. “We take full advantage of the fact

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**Providing critical administrative support on behalf of Vernon’s Public Works Department are (l-r): Clerk/Dispatcher Anne-Marie Carlson; Administrative Secretary Marie Michaels; and Administrative Clerk Diane McCabe.**



**Eric Nichols and Bill Darico stand between Public Work’s new side refuse loader and a front loader used to service town buildings and the many condominium complexes in Vernon.**

# Town of Vernon Public Works Department Facts and Figures

[www.vernon-ct.gov](http://www.vernon-ct.gov)

**Incorporated:** 1808 (original)  
1965 (after consolidation with the City of Rockville)

**Square Miles:** 18.03

**Population:** 29,620

**Road Miles Maintained:** 125+

**Rolling Stock and** 225 vehicles;

**Equipment Maintained:** 290 smaller machines

(includes department equipment and equipment from Parks and Recreation, Engineering, the Building Department, Tax Assessor, Fire Department, Police Department and Senior Center)

**Miles of Storm Sewers Maintained:** 57

**Catch Basins Maintained:** 4,000+

**Bridges Maintained:** 9

**Plow Routes:** 18

**Town Buildings Maintained:** 26

**Board of Education/School Buildings Maintained:** 8

**Refuse and Recycling – Homes Served:** 8000+ per week

**Public Works Department Employees:** 48  
(including three part-time)

- Director
- Lead Foreman
- Road Foremen: 2
- Supervisors: 2
- Administrative Clerical Staff: 3
- Truck Drivers: 9
- Equipment Operators: 3
- Refuse Drivers: 3
- Refuse Container Driver: 1
- Recycling Drivers: 2
- Refuse Laborers: 3
- Laborers: 7
- Mechanics: 5
- Maintainers: 2
- Custodian: 1
- Transfer Station Attendants: 2 (part-time)
- Garage Attendant: 1 (part-time)

## Key Personnel:

- Robert Kleinhans, Director of Public Works
- Ron Levesque, Lead Foreman
- Mark Dziejdzinski, Road Foreman
- Jeff Schambach, Road Foreman & Tree Warden
- Peter Griffiths, Refuse & Recycling Supervisor
- Dwight Ryniewicz, Vehicle & Equipment Supervisor
- Marie Michaels, Administrative Secretary
- Diane McCabe, Administrative Clerk
- Anne-Marie Carlson, Clerk/Dispatcher



**Bob Kleinhans (right) and Town Administrator John Ward work closely together to identify Vernon's public works priorities.**

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that Bob has the building experience from private industry, plus eight years on the Town Council," says Town Administrator John Ward. "We steal as many of his talents as we possibly can..."

Those talents and the talents of the Public Works staff will also be put to good use on a new intermodal transportation center currently in development at the Vernon Public Works facility on 375 Hartford Turnpike (Route 30). The transportation center, which is being funded in part by an \$8,000,000 federal grant, will accommodate local and interstate buses, as well as taxis, transportation for seniors, and a bicycle path that will tie into the town's rails-to-trails project. It will also interface with the state commuter lot on Route 30. "The transportation center is a very exciting project," says Kleinhans. "We expect it to be up and running in a few years."

Clearly, the Vernon Public Works Department has a lot on its plate, and despite the need to "do more with less," Kleinhans and his people are more than up to the task. "The bottom line is that we have a great bunch of people who know their jobs, love their community and love coming to work every day – and it shows in their work," says Kleinhans.

John Ward sums it up this way: "We have an incredible Public Works Department. The mayor, the entire administration and I are extremely happy with the work they have done all along, but especially now under Bob's leadership. We are very proud of what the department does – and we ask them to do a lot." 📌





In addition to being a truck driver, Adam Lung helps design and produce a wide range of street signs, vehicle graphics, and event billboards in Vernon's in-house sign department.



Repairing and maintaining Vernon's fleet of fire trucks is among the responsibilities of (l-r): Richard Toper, a mechanic, Vehicle and Equipment Supervisor Dwight Ryniewicz, and Eric Jensen, also a mechanic. Vernon boasts the largest volunteer fire department in Connecticut.

**"I have great supervisors and administrative people with years of experience in Vernon, as well as experience in other municipalities and in the private sector."**

Robert Kleinhans, Director of Public Works, Town of Vernon



This Vernon Public Works crew is patching a section of Wilshire Road, in anticipation of a reclaiming project scheduled for the spring.



As part of a concerted effort to cut costs without sacrificing the quality of the department's work, the Town of Vernon recently purchased this 60-foot utility bucket truck from the City of Sacramento, CA for \$26,000 – more than \$100,000 less than the cost of a new model.



## Defending Champions

Drivers from the Town of Vernon's Public Works Department have taken top prize at CASHO's Snowplow Safety Rodeo on several occasions, including in 2008 and 2009. "We have talented guys who are really good at what they do," says Public Works Director Robert Kleinhans. "I'm very big on the types of positive motivation and training the CASHO Rodeo provides."