



TOWN OF VERNON

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Jason Yerke and Distinctive Tree Care do a Good Deed and Save Vernon Taxpayers Thousands of Dollars

Dozens of Dead and Dying Trees Safely Removed from Valley Falls Park

(VERNON, Connecticut) – When Jason Yerke, a Vernon native and the owner of Distinctive Tree Care in South Windsor, purchased a new piece of equipment to take down dead and dying trees along roads and highways across Connecticut he wanted his crews to get some practice operating the machine.

Yerke and his team had been working in Vernon and spotted a cluster of dead and dying oak trees near the entrance to Valley Falls Park. Those trees were also on the radar of Jeff Schambach, Lead Foreman for Vernon Public Works and the Town's Tree Warden, and Marty Sitler, Director of Parks and Recreation. Both were searching their budgets and working with town administration and the finance department to find funds to hire a contractor to remove the trees.



Jeff Schambach, Vernon Department of Public Works lead foreman and tree warden, inspect the rotted out remains of a tree at Valley Falls Park as Jason Yerke, owner of Distinctive Tree Care, looks on.

Invasive pests such as the emerald ash borer, years of drought, serious storms and age have taken a toll on Connecticut's trees. Many are dead or dying and municipal staff and budgets struggle to keep up with the demand.

Yerke called Schambach and asked, "Jeff, I want to do something to help the town." Yerke offered to put his machine and crew to work to remove the dead trees near the entrance of Valley Falls Park at no cost to the Town. With permission from the Town, Yerke and Schambach went to work marking trees that needed to be removed.

Once the trees were marked for removal, Yerke unleashed his brand new, million dollar tree removal machine manufactured by the German company Sennebogen. It's an impressive piece of equipment that allows Distinctive Tree Care crews to take down a massive oak tree in minutes.



Vernon Department of Public Works Foreman Jeff Schambach surveys the trees taken down by Jason Yerke's crew and machine from Distinctive Tree Care.

The Sennebogen is a material handler equipped with a large tree grapple and a 32-inch harvester saw. Operator Josh Levesque, also a Vernon native, grabbed a tree with the grapple, then the saw cut the tree. Levesque used the machine to gently lower a section of tree to the ground. The machine and a skilled operator can take down a large tree with only four cuts, and remove as many as 200 trees in a day. It would take weeks for a traditional tree crew using a bucket truck to do that much work.

"This machine is incredible," Schambach said as he, Sitler and Yerke watched the Sennebogen and Levesque take down one tree after another.

In just a few hours, dozens of trees were removed. Days later Yerke's crew returned with a large chipper to dispose of the trees.

On Tuesday, October 5th, 2021, Vernon Mayor Dan Champagne and the Town Council honored and thanked Yerke for what he and his company did that day.

"I thank and appreciate all Jason Yerke and Distinctive Tree Care did in stepping up and helping our community," Mayor Champagne said. "His generous contribution and spirit of volunteerism show why Vernon is such a wonderful place to live."

Sitler was impressed by Yerke's generosity and the impact of the work at Valley Falls Park.

"Jason saved Vernon taxpayers a lot of money and helped us ensure a safer experience for everyone who uses one of our most popular parks and swimming areas," Sitler said.

For Yerke, the test at Valley Falls confirmed just how useful the Sennebogen will be. "I saw this machine at a trade show about four years ago and I was hooked," he said. Yerke saw a need for such a machine, especially along Connecticut's highways and tree-



Jason Yerke's Sennebogen machine reaches for and cuts a tree at Vernon's Valley Falls Park earlier this year.

lined rural roads. A lot of trees were going to have to come down and the Sennebogen would allow the work to be done efficiently, economically and safely.

It also makes a hazardous job a lot safer because no one has to work in the “fall zone.”



Jason Yerke of Distinctive Tree Care of South Windsor, left, and Sennebogen operator Josh Levesque, survey trees that need to be removed at Vernon's Valley Falls Park.

“The operator is in a well-protected cab with guards and hardened glass, and has tremendous stability, power and control,” Yerke said. “It’s very safe.”

Yerke and Distinctive Tree Care already had four smaller Sennebogens that can reach 44 feet and were adequate for about 80 percent of trees that need to come down. The new machine can reach 68 feet and will get the trees the other machines could not reach, Yerke said.

At Valley Falls Park, Yerke and his crew took down more than two dozen large oak trees in a single afternoon. The estimated cost for the work is over \$50,000, but Yerke did it for free.

“I grew up here in Vernon and I learned to swim here at Valley Falls,” Yerke said. “This is a great way for me to give back to my hometown.”

Yerke studied urban forestry at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and is a Connecticut-licensed arborist.

About the Town of Vernon

The Town of Vernon is a celebrated place to live, work and visit. From its beautiful parks and lakes, to its vast trails and historic homes and buildings, Vernon is a resilient and thriving community that promotes the health and wellbeing of its residents and values the natural environment. With a resident population of approximately 30,000 and occupying 18.03 square miles, Vernon combines a balanced appreciation of history, and a strong economic base for growth, both residential and commercial. Located 15 minutes east of the Connecticut capital of Hartford, and 25 miles from the City of Springfield, Massachusetts, the Town of Vernon is strategically located in “New England's Knowledge Corridor” with close proximity to some of the top colleges and universities in the country.

Designated a certified Sustainable Community, the Town of Vernon offers a wide range of benefits and services to its residents. The Town of Vernon is a full-service municipality that practices a management philosophy of continuous quality improvement. To learn more about the Town of Vernon, please call (860) 870- 3670 or visit www.vernon-ct.gov.

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