

Richmond Hires Vermont's First Wastewater Apprentice



by Paula Jackson
Apprenticeship Program Coordinator

In November, Tyler Booska became the first-ever wastewater apprentice in Vermont when he started at the Richmond Wastewater Treatment Facility.

“So good, so far,” Tyler says of his new job. “I like that it is something new every day at the plant, we have routine in some ways, but always a new task popping up. We stay nice and busy.”

Tyler is part of Vermont Rural Water's new Apprenticeship Program, launched this fall to train the next generation of water and wastewater operators. Through this program, apprentices receive two years of on-the-job training as well as classroom instruction while working at treatment plant and earning a salary.

The program aims to alleviate the worker shortage at drinking water and wastewater utilities in Vermont, which is expected to get worse as the state loses current operators to retirement.

This is the case for Richmond's current Water Resources Superintendent, Kendall Chamberlin. After 30 years in the field, Kendall is ready to start considering retirement, but doesn't want to leave the town without trained employees to run the water and wastewater systems.

“The work we do is, simply, the foundation of civilization,” Kendall said. “Without clean water and treated wastes, society eventually fails. That's what will keep you in the profession, knowing you are making a difference every day.”

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Kendall heard about the new Apprenticeship Program and was able to convince Richmond's Town Manager and Selectboard to hire an apprentice.

Tyler had been working as a welder, which frequently required traveling out of state, staying in hotels and being away from family and friends. It was time to find something more stable and closer to home in Vermont.

Tyler's stepfather, Erik Bailey, is the Superintendent of the Water Works Department in Hinesburg.

He encouraged Tyler to pursue a career in the water/wastewater field.

“I really like the variety of the jobs we do every day, from collecting samples, studying, to cleaning the septage machine,” Tyler said. “Well, maybe not the septage machine—but I know how important that machine is and what happens if we don't clean it!”

During his two-year apprenticeship, Tyler will learn the day-to-day operations of the wastewater treat-



From left: Aaron Krymkowski, Tyler Booska, and Alan Carpenter are preparing to take over at the Richmond Water Resources Department.

ment plant from Kendall and Richmond's two other operators, Allen Carpenter and Aaron Krymkowski.

He will also receive 288 hours of classroom instruction on topics including chemistry, microbiology, environmental science, and mechanics. Tyler will then take the certification exam to become a licensed operator.

With Tyler on board, Kendall will have a young staff of three well-trained operators able to carry on the important work of protecting public health and environmental safety in Richmond.

The water/wastewater field needs dedicated workers like Tyler to take over for the retiring generation. New operators will need to be ready to take on the challenges of climate change and the effects it may have on our water resources.

This month, two more apprentices started at wastewater systems in South Burlington and Springfield.

To all the retiring water and wastewater operators in Vermont, thank you for your years of dedication to ensuring that Vermonters have safe water to drink and our lakes and rivers stay clean and beautiful. 💧