

Dummerston Names New Road Commissioner

By Roger Turner

Leon Chamberlin, Jr. was raised in Dummerston, the son of Carol and Leon Chamberlin, Sr. After graduating from Brattleboro Union High School, he went to work on the Scott Farm, took a four-year break to serve as a fire fighter in the U.S. Air Force, then returned to the Scott Farm and, for a brief period, worked at the Green Mountain Orchard in Putney. He began to work for the Dummerston Highway Department in 1994. He built his own home on Kipling Road in 1990. He married Martha Kenny and became step-father to her three children.

He joined the Dummerston Volunteer Fire Department in 1981 when he was fourteen years old, and today serves as the first assistant chief.

In other words, Lee Chamberlin has strong Dummerston roots and lots of experience on the roads crew, and when Wayne Emery announced his retirement, he threw his hat in the ring to be his successor. The sensible selectboard of course offered him the job.

I caught up with Lee in the town garage office, sitting at his desk, less than a month after starting his new job. There's something symbolic about this—not finding him at the controls

of the grader, but sitting at a desk—which reflects the nature of his new responsibilities. “How's the job going?” I asked him. “Any surprises?” “Well, there's more paperwork than I thought there would be,” he replied.

Lee heads a four-man department, though they are currently short one man and in the process of hiring for the fourth slot. The other two highway department employees are Arthur Jacobs and Wayne Holden.

He anticipates several challenges as road commissioner. One is maintaining a source for gravel. As anyone who reads the *Views* is aware, there is a limited life for the recently acquired Carpenter pit, and the selectboard is already working with the Putney selectboard to figure out its successor. Another challenge is complying with training requirements for road crews as well as for “mine workers”, which all members of the road crew have become because they work in the gravel pit. The Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA) requires eight fully-documented annual hours of training by a certified instructor for anyone

who works in a “mine”. In addition, the department must provide on-going training in highway department procedures. All highway department employees are enrolled in the “Vermont Local Roads Program” at St. Michael's College, working toward certification as an *Equipment Scholar* and/or a *Road Scholar*. Lee is taking courses to become a *Road Scholar*. “I've got to take a management course that's



about to come up, which will be one class a month for a year, including a presentation at the end,” Lee explained.

Another challenge is a limited budget when compared to the full scope of work that Lee would like to get done. For instance, there is a big need for new culverts all around town, both in areas that don't drain properly and on roads that have long downhill stretches where large volumes of water can build up, with the resulting threat of significant erosion.

Brush clearing along the sides of roads and tree-limbing above the roads are also maintenance procedures which are respectively contracted out and neglected. “The brush situation in town is hard to keep up with,” Lee observed. “It's starting to grow up closer and closer to the roads. Keeping it cut back is very labor intensive – there's no quick way of doing it. And tree branches are growing down, too, which you don't notice if you're in a car, but in some places it's hard to get a truck through. People have a right to drive down the road without getting their vehicles scratched, and in

some places because of how much the trees are hanging down, there is a problem,” he continued. “We'd do a better job if we did this work ourselves (rather than contract it out). It might take some extra money to get started, but we'd save money over the long-term.”

Finding extra money for the budget is therefore also a challenge, but Lee has a couple of thoughts about how to find it. “We should go after all the grants we can. Usually grants require the town to fund a percentage of the value of the grant, usually about ten percent, so the grants we go after should be for things that are already in our budget.” Dummerston already gets money from the state based on its road system. “If we can get a class 3 road reclassified as a class 2 road, our money from the state would go up approximately \$3000 per mile for that road.” He further explained that the mileage limit for class 2 road funding is twenty five percent of the town's total road system, which in Dummerston is 61 total miles. The criteria for a class 2 road are that it is used by an average of 400 cars a day, has to be a “through road” (as opposed to a dead end road), and must be able to serve as a detour route if another road in town is blocked. Lee is therefore considering which roads might meet these criteria,

so that the town can get the appropriate level of reimbursement from the state.

“There are places in town where the roads are somewhat dangerous because of slides or because the road is too close to the edge of a steep drop-off, and I'd like to get them fixed,” was Lee's final comment about challenges the road crew faces.

As we know from the roast of retired road commissioner Wayne Emery, it seems to be customary for anybody in that job to get calls at home, so I asked Lee how he feels about this practice. “Oh, I don't mind that; it comes with the job,” he answered. “But I go to bed at nine o'clock, so don't call me after that!”

“There are always projects we're working on in the department,” Lee concluded. “I was happy just to be a member of the road crew. I applied to be commissioner because I saw things that I'd like to see get done, and I thought the best way to do it would be to become the commissioner. I have a love of the roads, and my goal is to improve the roads during the time I'm road commissioner.”