



A Nod to the Works

Fans of Valparaiso have many favorite parts of our city – the parks, the pathways, the safe streets, the downtown. Yet, in many ways, all of these highlights come down to the *people* who create, run, and maintain Valparaiso. In this issue of City Talk, we look at the people who make it all happen. The Valparaiso City employees who show up every day to make sure your water runs, your trash is removed, your calls are answered, and more.

Who IS the City of Valparaiso workforce?

The city's workforce includes 319 full-time employees (including both City of Valparaiso and Valparaiso City Utilities workers), plus 24 seasonal staffers to round out the team – running a city that serves 13,895 households, maintains 166+ miles of roadways, 17 parks, its own ambulance service, transit system, and more.

Efficient and Local

"We're an efficient city when it comes to resources and manpower," said Bill Oeding, Valpo's City Administrator. "In fact, we've added less than 25 positions to the workforce over the past 20 years, despite the fact that we've added more than 37 miles of roadway, nearly 3,500 new households, opened a third fire station, added ambulance and transit services, and host many more events downtown," he explained. "We're also your neighbors," said Oeding. Most of the city's workforce lives in Valparaiso and enjoys the same services they deliver daily.

Experienced and Progressive

The City of Valparaiso benefits from a low turnover rate, reducing recruiting and training needs. In fact, more than 25 current city employees have more than

30 years of experience each. "While it's a credit to the city that so many employees remain with us for years, we're also known as a progressive city and we attract young workers as well," said Lynn Gralik, Human Resources Director for the City of Valparaiso.

Equal Opportunities

The city also works to attract a diverse workforce. "We're an equal opportunity employer and welcome all races, genders, and backgrounds. You'll find many nationalities and backgrounds among our workers and we continue to make sure opportunities are marketed broadly to invite diverse resumes," said Gralik.

Read on in this issue to learn more about your Valparaiso workers.

Dear Neighbors,

Thank you to each and every one of you for your patience throughout this season of construction and enhancement in Valparaiso. I've heard people joke that the construction cone is the new city symbol. While frustrating for travel, we'll all be glad to have a record number of smooth roadways, an efficient roundabout, and a beautifully functional City Hall as we close out the year.

Visit www.valpo.us for City News, Announcements & Events



This issue of City Talk is a special one as we highlight The Works – those people who make this city happen. As mayor, I get to hear a lot

of compliments about our city – from residents and visitors alike. I mean it when I say that the credit really goes to the people who make it all happen, day in and day out. I work alongside so many talented, hardworking, and responsive people and I'm grateful for their dedication to our city.

This issue of City Talk is also special as it's my last as your mayor. Working with this extraordinary team and for this incredible community has been the most fulfilling job. I'm proud of our collective accomplishments and excited for our future. I love this city and hope to stay engaged in our future by bringing value as an active former mayor. Valparaiso is a truly remarkable community.

Sincerely,

Jon Costas

Jon Costas, Mayor



Your Valparaiso Public Works Department works 24/7 to maintain streets, remove trash/recycling, remove brush/yard waste/leaves, maintain the city's four cemeteries, create and install street signs, maintain most of the city's entire fleet of vehicles, and more.

Public Works is 24/7

"You may not notice we were there, but you'd definitely notice if we weren't," says Nate McGinley, about the city's Public Works department. McGinley serves as Director of Public Works, the city's maintenance arm. While many people think of Public Works as the "street department," their role extends well beyond caring for the city's 166 miles of roadway.

Versatile and Reliable

Year-round and around the clock, the 56-person Public Works team is responsible for maintaining roadways and sidewalks, picking up solid waste and recycling, removing brush/yard waste/leaves, running the city's composting site (partnered with Porter County), removing snow, maintaining city trees, maintaining the city's four cemeteries, creating and installing street signs, maintaining most of the city's entire fleet of vehicles, installing more than 100 ADA compliant sidewalk ramps each year, and more.

Because the work changes with the season and the day, the team is trained to be versatile. "Virtually every single person here is essentially interchangeable and we're trained that way so that the work continues consistently, despite vacations or illness or season. The same person filling a pothole this morning might be driving a truck or picking up leaves or sweeping streets this afternoon," explained Brent Dickson, Assistant Director for Public Works.

Public Works is also one of the city's jobs that is most affected by weather. When a snow storm hits after midnight, the team becomes snow removal specialists, leaving their homes in the dark to operate 14+ snowplows day and night to clear all 166 miles of roadway and 130 cul-de-sacs, plus city cemeteries, parking lots, downtown sidewalks, and street parking spaces. The snow removal crew works through holidays, often leaving their own families on the most special of holidays to ensure Valpo streets are clear for others.

Maintaining Priorities

The Public Works team is instrumental in extending the life of city assets. Not only do they repair streets and sidewalks, but they operate as the city's in-house vehicle maintenance department for their own vehicles as well as those for Valparaiso City Utilities, Police, City Hall, and even some fire equipment. "The vehicle maintenance department is non-stop. We depend heavily on them, so that if a snow plow goes down or a leaf vac fails, we don't have to wait for a service center, we can keep going with minimal downtime," said McGinley who is also proud of their innovation. "Our shop even builds equipment for our specific uses, like transforming a retired recycling truck into the ultimate brush truck, equipping it so that we can collect brush for long periods before needing to return to dump it."



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install more than 100 ADA compliant sidewalk ramps each year.

like their street paved or their sidewalk replaced. We wish we could do that too, but no city has an unlimited budget. We make paving decisions based on a nationally-accepted rating system that factors in condition, road usage, safety, and cost," McGinley explained. "While we can't tell everyone that their road is on today's paving list, our goal is to be responsive and deliver the very best service. Most of us live in Valparaiso too. We want the best for our community."

On the Front lines

Because Public Works hits every street of the city nearly every day, they often interact with the community in unique ways. For instance, last year Public Works employees Ed Polletta and Chris Bodie saved the day when they found a wedding ring while routinely

vacuuming fall leaves. Polletta's vigilance has been invaluable through the years as he once spotted a woman who had fallen on her porch and once alerted authorities when he noticed unretrieved newspapers on a resident's porch – both times leading to rescues of residents who desperately needed help.

Job Security

As long as trash cans fill, leaves and snow fall, and streets connect us, Public Works will be working to serve Valparaiso residents, 24/7 with just six holidays each year (which delay trash/recycling pickups by one day). To learn more about those holidays, what you can leave at the curb, and which streets will be paved this year, visit the Public Works page at Valpo.us.

Maximizing city funds and taxpayer dollars drives Public Works each day as they work to make both equipment and infrastructure last. "The reality is that we do have to field our share of complaints. Everyone would

Reaching Out

City works to recruit a diverse and talented workforce

"The City of Valparaiso has a very talented workforce. We're fortunate to both attract and retain quality workers," said Lynn Gralik, Valpo's Human Resources Director. Yet when opportunities do arise, the city looks for talented and diverse applicants to join the ranks. "For new positions, we've expanded our scope, inviting talent through regional and national job sites," she said.

The Police and Fire Departments both have organized recruiting efforts, created to ensure a pool of qualified applicants is available as retirements approach. To make the process more efficient, the departments typically have an annual recruiting period where written and physical testing happen at one time.

"We totally rethought our recruiting process so that we could attract a greater audience and more diverse candidates," said Fire Chief Chad Dutz. To reach more candidates, the VFD marketed through social media, a flyer, a video, and expanded their recruiting period to two

months. The effort paid off as they received more applicants than ever this year, including female, Hispanic, black, and bilingual candidates. "We had people from as far away as Colorado and Texas come in for the test," said Dutz.

"Our department is still mostly white and male. Nationwide, we see that most applicants for firefighting positions are white and male. But we want to be progressive in reaching out to a broader base," he said. The VFD hiring process continues and offers will be extended early next year as opportunities arise.

The Valparaiso Police Department has also expanded their recruiting efforts to attract a diverse pool of applicants. Their recruiting efforts include talking to students in local schools, attending recruiting seminars, visiting universities, and social media postings.

To advance their recruiting, last year they collaborated with Valparaiso University to create a Law Enforcement Test Preparation course. "We



saw quality applicants struggling to pass the law enforcement exam. It occurred to me that if I want to be an electrician, I need to practice and study for that field. The same is true for policing. So, we worked with VU to create this innovative prep course to enhance knowledge and skills. It's an excellent recruiting opportunity," said Balon.

The VPD currently includes officers who are female, Hispanic, black, and bilingual. "We don't hire just to fill a spot. We're looking for candidates with the right attitude to carry on our culture of community policing," said Balon.

For more information about current opportunities within the City of Valparaiso, an equal opportunity employer, visit Valpo.us.

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The Two at the Top

Richard Robinson and Lee Evans are Valpo's longest serving employees

Rick Robinson and Lee Evans know their way around Valparaiso. The two Public Works employees have worked for the city longer than anyone else on the current payroll, with Robinson marking 44 years of service last February and Evans looking at his 44-year anniversary in January 2020.

"I remember when we worked six days a week. And back then, we didn't have automated trucks like we do now – we emptied the cans into the trucks by hand," recalled Evans of his early days on the job. Robinson agrees that times have changed. "I remember there were just six snowplow drivers when I started. Now it takes 14 of us

with all the new roads," he said. Together they've done practically every job the Public Works performs, including picking up trash, leaves, and recycling; plowing snow, digging graves, cleaning streets, trimming trees, and installing concrete – all the old-fashioned way.

The automation and added staffing haven't softened Robinson and Evans. Evans is still first on the job in the morning, unlocking the doors for the crew. Neither has retirement on their radar. Robinson's own father, Loray Robinson, was also a longtime Public Works employee –



Lee Evans and Richard Robinson have worked for the City of Valparaiso longer than anyone else on the current payroll at 43 and 44 years.

retiring after 48 years. "This is a great place to work and the people of Valparaiso are terrific," said Robinson of the reason he's stayed. Evans agrees, "I like the guys I work with. Otherwise, I wouldn't have been here this long."

Banta Neighbors Introduce Signage



Inspired by the City of Valparaiso's Neighborhood Grant Program, the city's Banta Neighborhood Association came together to design toppers to enhance selected street signs throughout their neighborhood. Pictured are (left to right) Banta neighbors Josh Allen, Ambica Macalka, Bryan McFadden, Jo Tudor, and James Tudor. The Neighborhood Improvement Grant Program was designed to give residents an opportunity to have direct input and influence into the improvement of Valparaiso's neighborhoods. 2019 grant applications are being reviewed at this time. To learn more about how to apply for a grant and unite your neighbors in other ways, visit the Community Engagement page at Valpo.us.



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Neighborhood Notes

To be a good neighbor, remember to observe ordinances that affect others, such as not parking over sidewalks or pathways.