



Patrick Sullivan makes the second Assessor of the Year working for West Hartford

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The town was already reaping the benefits of Patrick Sullivan's talents before he came to work in the assessor's office here for a second time.

The Connecticut Association of Assessing Officers (CAAO) named Sullivan, a senior property appraiser, Assessor of the Year last month. Working with Lawrence Lebel from the Manchester assessor's office, Sullivan developed a software system to help identify and value residential and commercial trailers.

A trailer is defined as something pulled by another vehicle. There are many different types, including boat, travel, utility, camping, freight, dump, flatbed, fifth-wheel, giant leaf vacuum and snowmobile trailers.

“There was previously no method for identifying them,” Sullivan said. Each town would get a list from the state Department of Motor Vehicles. “In West Hartford, there are just over 1,000 registered trailers.” Because there are so many different types, manufacturers, makes and models, “there was no easy way to identify them” and assign them a value on which they would be taxed.



Patrick Sullivan has been named the Assessor of the Year by the Connecticut Association of Assessing Officers.



Patrick Sullivan, a senior property appraiser, and Assessor Joseph Dakers Sr., sit across the hall from one another. Sullivan's job was done by Dakers before his promotion. Both have been honored as the Assessor of the Year.

Sullivan began in the assessor's field in Vernon in 2002. "Every year it was frustrating. There was no uniformity. It was very difficult to identify them, so it was difficult and time-consuming to accurately price them," he said.

About two years ago, he decided to do something about it and talked with Lebel. The two asked other towns to share their lists, making for a larger sample. They grouped them by the 17-digit vehicle identification number and were able to identify many types of trailers.

"We researched most of last year," Sullivan said. Then, "the CAAO contracted with Express Software Production in East Granby to help us develop our program." This year, the scope of the project expanded "from just being able to identify various types of trailers to programming pricing mechanisms that allow us to value many types of trailers."

There is no guide listing identification information for all the types of trailers that are manufactured, and information provided by the DMV was often incomplete, making it difficult for staff to accurately identify and value trailers.

Association towns contribute \$30 annually to use and maintain the program, which members can download for free.

East Hartford Assessor Brian Smith praised Sullivan's work for the association, saying, "This system will greatly help 169 assessors statewide." It was Sullivan's work on this project that earned him Assessor of the Year, said Smith, who was on the CAAO's awards committee.

Sullivan was Simsbury's assistant assessor before he was hired last month by West Hartford. In some ways, he's come full circle.

"I graduated from college in 1988. The Town of West Hartford was working on the 1989 town revaluation at the time. I got a job with the revaluation firm that was contracted to perform that revaluation," he said. "I took this as a summer job and I enjoyed it, so I stayed with it."

He worked for several towns and cities in Connecticut before starting this own revaluation company with two partners in 1994. The firm handled revaluations in about a dozen towns, including West Hartford's in 1999.

After eight years, he sold the firm and went to work in Vernon, then Simsbury.

“I lived in West Hartford most of my life,” Sullivan said. “I moved to the town when I was 12. I played basketball here,” he said, referring to his office, which in the gymnasium of the former Hall High, now town hall. “We had our practices here Monday and Wednesday nights.”

Since 1988, there have been a lot of changes, including a more vibrant and commercial feel to the downtown area, he said.

“As I drive around town and see the positive changes going on, I realize it is actually because things have not changed at the town hall. By that I mean we have now had three consecutive mayors – Mayor Bouvier, Mayor Harris, and Mayor Slifka – who have been able to get town council Democrats and Republicans to successfully work together to achieve the goals of smart growth and maintain prudent spending practices. I believe these consistent practices have helped enable the town to keep taxes at reasonable levels and maintain the caliber of school system that West Hartford has always had. I guess the more things stay the same, the more they will change,” Sullivan said.

Another change is in technology. “In the late ‘80s, computers were just starting to come on the scene.”

Asked if there’s another assessment project he’d consider tackling, he said, “There are some things we can do with commercial trucks” to help identify amenities.

“The Town of West Hartford is fortunate to have hired Patrick [Sullivan] as its commercial property appraiser. I’m delighted that he accepted the position here,” said Assessor Joseph Dakers Sr.

Of the trailer program, he said, “We were a benefactor of that product before [Sullivan] became employed” here.

Dakers began working here in 2002 after taking early retirement from the City of Hartford, where he’d worked for 27 years. Two years ago, Dakers had Sullivan’s job. And, two years ago, he also had the honor of being chosen Assessor of the Year.

Association members nominate individuals who are then reviewed by the awards committee. Dakers' selection "was primarily due to his work on the bylaws committee" that involved extensive changes and much effort over an extended period.

Dakers remains active in the CAAO. He is still chairman of the bylaws committee and had been co-chairman of the personal property committee as well.

"Somewhere along the way, someone thought I was doing a good job. I thought I was working too hard," he said.

Both Sullivan and Dakers, along with other department staff, are working to compile the 2009 Grand List.

"Everything we do here is governed by state tax law," not by municipal laws, Dakers said.