



## PEOPLE OF THE TOWN OFFICES

This is the seventh in a series of profiles of the people at Haddam's Town Office Building, who they are and what they do to serve the residents of our community.

# Robin Munster: Haddam's Personal Banker



by Alan Aronow

Before assuming the role of town treasurer, Munster worked in the retail industry. While living in Hawaii, she was involved with opening and running a fashionable Coach Leather store. The last seven years of her retail career were spent managing catalog/web sales for Waterworks, the internationally renowned kitchen/bathroom fixture supplier based in Danbury.

The Munster's have a 5-year old daughter, Victoria, who is in kindergarten. Robin Munster is active locally; serving on the town's recently established Code of Ethics Committee, as well as being a member of the Haddam Junior Women's Group. She enjoys gardening, knitting, and photography.

### The Town Treasurer— Safeguarding Public Funds

So, what does the town treasurer do? Connecticut's General Statute §7-80 defines the role of the town treasurer in the following way:

“The town treasurer shall receive all money belonging to the town, pay it out on the order of the proper authority and keep a record of all moneys received and when received and of all moneys paid out, when, for what and upon whose authority, which record shall always be open to the inspection of any taxpayer in such town and shall be presented to each an-

nual town meeting, being first sworn to by him and adjusted by the selectmen. The town treasurer shall be, ex officio, treasurer of the town trust funds and may appoint a deputy who shall, in the absence or disability of the town treasurer, perform all his duties.”

While this language may seem straightforward, complexities arise because public funds these days come from various sources (property taxes, license and permit fees, state and federal grants, etc.) and are disbursed from many specialized accounts. Haddam has sixteen separate accounts; and, if this isn't complex enough, many of the accounts have both reserved and unreserved components.

Like most other Connecticut communities, Haddam has a finance department, which works with the board of selectmen and the board of finance to prepare and manage the town's annual budget. As such, the treasurer is not overly involved administering the day-to-day business activities of the town.

One of the key roles played by the town treasurer is to verify that receipts of public funds get credited to the proper

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EVERY TWO YEARS Haddam residents elect a town treasurer to serve as a paid, part-time official, whose role in municipal finance is not well understood, but always complex and demanding. In 2009, and again in 2011, voters elected Robin Munster (Republican), as the town treasurer.

Munster was born and raised in Clinton, and attended Eastern Connecticut State University where she earned a BS degree in Biology. In 1995, she married Eric Munster, who grew up in Haddam and shortly thereafter, they moved to Hawaii (we should all be so lucky!) After living in Hawaii five-years the couple started to become a bit homesick for New England. When a situation arose to relocate back to Haddam they jumped at the opportunity.

“Five-thousand miles is a long way to be away from friends and family,” Munster said. “Believe it or not, I really missed the changing seasons!”

### TOWN TREASURER FACTS & FIGURES

*Town Treasurer: Robin Munster*

*Phone Number: 860-345-8531 (Ext # 202)*

*Office Hours: Tuesday-Thursday 9-12*

accounts and that checks written (which must be signed by either the treasurer and/or two selectmen) are drawn from the correct accounts.

The other principal responsibility of the town treasurer is to invest funds held in the town's various accounts in the most profitable, safe, and efficient manner.

"While we all look to get the best return on our money, state law restricts where the town can invest," Munster explained. "Banks have to be qualified to hold municipal accounts and be insured beyond the basic FDIC amount."

Munster has created a list of banks within Connecticut, including Citizens Bank and Liberty Bank, which meet the requirements, and keeps an eagle eye on interest rates at various banks to insure the town is receiving the highest rates for its money. In all, the town treasurer has approximately \$7,500,000 in public funds to actively manage.

Where public funds are invested makes a significant difference in town revenues, as does the prevailing level of interest rates in the marketplace. Five-years ago the town earned almost \$300,000 in interest income when money market rates were about 5.0% but since then rates have nose-dived (now about 0.6% for money market funds), which has reduced town income significantly. For the current 2011-2012 fiscal year, interest income is projected to be only \$35,000.

### **A Day in the Life of the Town Treasurer—It's All About Money**

Munster's job requires visits to town hall on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday mornings where she shares an office with Georgia Emanuel, Haddam's finance coordinator. When specifically requested, the town treasurer also attends meetings of the board of selectmen or the board of finance.

During a typical workweek, the town treasurer receives monies paid to the

town clerk, assessor, land use, tax collector, building department, and first selectman's office for various licenses, permits, and fees. These funds are reconciled and then deposited into the appropriate accounts.

Serious money starts rolling into town hall in January and July when Haddam residents make their semi-annual property tax payments (this year to the tune of about \$24,500,000).

These funds are first carefully credited to the appropriate taxpayer account by the tax collector and then verified by the finance office and town treasurer before being deposited into the appropriate bank account.

As mentioned, the town maintains a number of different accounts for specific purposes. These include the general fund, nonrecurring capital fund, ten special non-major government funds (like open space, STIFF, medical insurance reserve, historic document preservation, etc.), two employee pension funds and a fiduciary trust fund. The town's largest and most active account is the general fund, which includes both a money market and checking account. This checking account is used on almost a daily basis to pay the town's bills and payroll.

Munster said that one of her most important objectives is to keep town funds in the money market account for as long as possible to earn the highest interest before being transferred to the checking account.

Like a personal checking account, the town has to have money in the bank so checks won't bounce. To accomplish this, cash flow management is critical and requires the coordinated efforts of the town treasurer, tax collector, and financial coordinator. This is of special importance considering the nine scheduled payments that will be made this year to Regional School District #17.

These nine checks, totaling \$20,225,683, will be the largest written by the town.

### **Accuracy Is Job #1**

When Munster took over the treasurer's position she began to make improvements in the way that deposits were accounted for and has since added new control procedures to safeguard the integrity of Haddam's funds.

She does this by personally counting all deposits and having department heads sign-off on her tallies. On a monthly basis she verifies the balance sheet of all deposits made, checks written, payroll entries and transfers.

This procedure ensures that the monies are being placed into the proper accounts and that the entries made to the accounting system are correct. All of this information is then certified at the end of the year when the outside independent auditors inspect the town's finances.

In addition to all of these tasks, Munster serves on a committee along with other key town officials (supplemented by the services of a professional investment advisor) to manage the town's pension fund covering employees and volunteer firemen.

Finally, while the town of Haddam is fortunate in having very little debt, this year, the town treasurer will be extremely involved, along with the first selectman, in negotiating and issuing the \$2,750,000 long-term bond needed to finance construction of the new transfer station.

If you have questions about the town's high finances that need down-to-earth answers contact Robin Munster at: **860-345-8531** (Ext # 202) or *finance@haddam.org* via email.