

In the Spotlight

Highlighting Exceptional Employees

Teamwork

With daffodils appearing and the scent of spring in the air, the inclement weather our community was dealing with only a few weeks ago seems like a distant memory.

As Emergency Management Coordinator for the Town of Chapel Hill, I had a front row seat to view the amazing teamwork of our Town staff during their response to three major storm events in February—“Octavia” on Feb. 16–17, a surprise storm on Feb. 24, and then “Remus” on Feb. 25–26.

What does it take to keep the roads clear in Chapel Hill? The rough totals for the two weeks of storms—59,000 gallons of brine, 285 tons of salt, 200 tons of sand, and 1,500 pounds of ice melt. Our crews operated 12 plow trucks, six salt-sand trucks, four brine trucks and seven motor graders. Our partners in clearing roadways—the NC Department of Transportation—put 13 combination trucks and seven motor graders to use to clear Chapel Hill roads. The Town is responsible for snow removal along more than 750 streets totaling about 350 lane miles.

Our Town Storm Response Team includes public works crews clearing roadways of snow and fallen trees, police officers managing traffic issues, and fire personnel responding to emergencies. During the Feb. 16 event, Chapel Hill police responded to three collisions over the three days. When the surprise storm of Feb. 24 arrived, there were more than 27

storm-related collisions. Not counting Emergency Medical Service calls, the Fire Department responded to 197 fire response calls—more than double the norm—during the two-week period.

Many other Town staff also respond during weather emergencies, offering services by way of Chapel Hill Transit bus service when it was safe and reasonable to do so, and also at Town Hall, the library, and recreation centers to answer to citizen needs. With power outages to thousands of homes and the University and public schools being closed, Chapel Hill Public Library became more popular than ever. On an average weekday, about 1,300 people visit the library. On the day before the Feb. 25 snow storm, this number nearly doubled to 2,110 visitors. Library staff set up a free hot drinks station, and provided areas where residents without power could recharge their phones and other devices.

Town communications staff sent email news notices to resident subscribers and used Twitter and other social media to provide relevant and safety news. Over a three-day period, the public engaged with the Town a total of about 6,000 times by directly interacting with the 117 tweets issued during the storm. Another public communications tool offered by the Town is an interactive weather map that provides updates on where public works crews have treated roads.

During the weather emergency last month, we saw how our town can

Value in the Spotlight

Teamwork



come together in times of hardship to help neighbors and assist friends and strangers alike. Police Officer Jefferies picked up a shovel to dig a car out of Porthole Alley. Early morning bus drivers also shoveled pathways for riders. Library staff carpooled in from Hillsborough to provide adequate coverage to open. Bus drivers transported residents to the temporary shelter at Smith Middle School. The best character of Chapel Hill shined through.

RESPECT Values

Responsibility
Equity
Safety
Professionalism
Ethics
Communication
Teamwork

