



The Art of Snow Plowing
Thursday, January 31, 2008

The call came at 4:00 a.m. during the best sleep I've had in quite awhile. It was Theresa asking "Do you still want to go?" Of course I do. It's all in the line of duty or shall I say my new assignment? Let me explain.

Almost on a daily basis, city staff continues to think of new ways to inform the citizens of just what the city does. The newest idea will put the citizens in the 'virtual reality' seat of city employee activities. That's where I come in. I have the task of writing about these activities. How better to do that than actually experiencing them? The first topic in this series is my experience of accompanying Theresa during snow plowing of city streets. It is the Street Department that is responsible for maintaining approximately 36.72 miles of city streets. Just think of this as driving north on U.S./31 to the first Saugatuck exit and back.

So how does the process begin? Street Department staff checks the weather report daily. If it looks as if inclement weather (snow) is headed our way, staff is in 'ready' mode, awaiting a possible phone call. If snow accumulations reach 2" or more, then two staff members report to work at 4:00 a.m. If needed, they call in co-workers to assist. During weekends, a staff person checks the weather report around 4:00 to 5:00 a.m. More often than not, staffing is prescheduled.



As the truck pulled up at the end of my street, I stood and looked at how high I was going to have to climb to get inside. It is two big steps to the door. Taking my seat, I realize that I am sitting up very high from the ground. Even though I am afraid of heights, I felt very safe in this seat.

Theresa has been driving a snow plow for 14 years. She says that she can follow the curb by "feel". From my perspective, she does a "stand up" job. We started out plowing the State trunk lines. In heavy snow, as such was the case this morning, four trucks go out and stagger across the lane. At Aylworth and Broadway intersection, she pointed out that the State has made cutbacks on the trunk lines and this intersection being one of them. The city receives less state funds so therefore, absorbs the costs once the budgeted funds are used.

Normally, school routes would be a top priority. However, schools were closed today. I inquired how the drivers find that out. Theresa told me that a school staff person gives one of the drivers an early morning phone call. That's great communications!

We headed for the north side to plow North Shore Drive. It was nothing short of thrilling to be the passenger and see the utility poles only inches from the plow. I did notice a few gouges and understood how easy it would be to hit a pole. This really takes talent to miss one.

Something else Theresa explained to me. Normally, two trucks work together to plow the streets. While plowing Ward 2 streets, we came to an intersection and Theresa pulled to the

side of the street. Todd, in the lead truck, began to go back and forth plowing the section where the side street intersects the other street. I learned that if this was not done, a snow-shaped “V” would form and freeze in the street. This would make it difficult for vehicles to maneuver and trucks to plow.



On this particular morning, several inches of snow had accumulated. More staff was called in at midnight to help clear the downtown streets and sidewalks. During the night is the best time before businesses open and traffic begins appearing.

As you can imagine, it is very important to pay close attention while driving one of these trucks. To help each other, the lead truck will radio the others informing them of pedestrians, citizens shoveling snow and operating snow blowers. The drivers cease plowing to avoid any mishaps and then start up again when the area is clear. Ever wondered why your driveway was plowed in? Truth of the matter is, there is no way to avoid it. The drivers have routine routes and unfortunately, may deposit snow in your drive after you have shoveled it. It would be time consuming and nearly impossible for them to stop the plow at every driveway – the streets would never be completely free of snow!

Later that day, I rode with Maryann who plows all of the dead end streets and major sidewalks with the “V” plow. It was a fun ride going down the Water Street sidewalk. On numerous occasions, you can see her on WWMT Live Eye camera.

The drivers would like to offer a few helpful hints to assist in making the snow plowing operation go smoothly. Don't pull out in front of the trucks. I actually witnessed this happen. Please turn on your headlights while out in inclement weather. You will be much easier to see. When installing a mailbox at the street, try to give ample space for a plow coming by. One more thing . . . Try not to park on your street during heavy snowfall. Doing so can cause a delay in plowing your street.



I hope this article was informational to you. I know that I learned first-hand some of the procedures of snow plowing that I had no idea took place. If you would like an experience of your own, call the Department of Public Works to get on a list. (637-0737). Depending on the weather, a “ride along” opportunity may not happen this season, but you'll be on the list for next season.

For more adventure, go to the city's home page and view some photos and video – <http://www.south-haven.com>

I am looking forward to sharing my next experience with you. If you have suggestions for topics, you are welcome to email me at: ddavidson@south-haven.com

Until next time,

Deb Davidson