

Public Works preserves the safety of the public

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By [Kathy Jefcoats](#)

kjefcoats@news-daily.com



From left, Forest Park Public Works employees Bruce Robinson, Lifus Ferguson, Robert Tucker and street supervisor Bobby Jinks proved their dedication to the city by working overtime during last week's unusual winter storm. They are a handful of the 28 workers who stayed on the job to make the streets passable and help motorists. (Staff Photo: Kathy Jefcoats)

FOREST PARK — The snow and ice have melted from Clayton County streets and yards but winter is just getting started with more inclement weather possible before daffodils push through the cold ground to herald the arrival of spring.

Residents in Forest Park can be grateful to have a dedicated public works department to ensure their safety should the effects of Winter Storm Leon ever be duplicated.

Public Works Director Jeff Eady said 28 workers logged from four to 32 hours of overtime during the period last week when the roads were most treacherous. He just took the director's position a month or so ago and was impressed by their

dedication.

"What I found outstanding about these guys is there was not one complaint," he said. "When we needed something done, they were 'johnny-on-the-spot.' Shoot, they love it. This is what we do."

Eady said the priority was to treat roadways to keep them passable but workers also helped about a half-dozen motorists who had drifted off the ice onto the shoulder or ditch. No drivers were stranded longer than a few minutes, he said.

"Public Works crews were placed on 12-hour rotating shifts to keep them fresh and alert and allow for the most efficient treatment of the city roads and essential areas," Eady said. "All main thoroughfares were classified as first response priority roads."

Bridges also got sand and size 89 stones first, followed by City Hall, Forest Park Police Department and surrounding roads, all Forest Park fire stations and Jones Road, so emergency personnel could access the city's fuel pumps.

Eady said workers first tried to simply remove the fallen snow from roads but because of freezing temperatures, snowflakes fast turned to ice, creating hazardous driving conditions.

"They were quickly overwhelmed with the rate the snow was melting and turning to ice," he said.

Overall, the city responded well to the unusual weather, said Eady. City Manager Frank Brandon made the decision early Tuesday to get workers back home as quickly as possible.

"We were fortunate to get all our employees home safely," Eady said. "Everyone came in Tuesday, they got payroll done and everyone went home by 10 a.m. At a time when (metro Atlanta) public employees were being criticized for a poor response to the latest weather event, the Forest Park Public Works Department employees worked day and night."

It was a group effort, he said.

"The crews communicated well with the police and fire departments through the emergency communications center," Eady said. "The event lasted a total of 56 hours from Tuesday morning to Thursday at 5 p.m. when the department resumed normal operational hours."

Eady, who worked alongside his employees from 7:30 a.m. Tuesday to 5 p.m. Wednesday, said eight to 10 people were available continuously to handle the duties necessary to keep the roads open and the public safe. There were hiccups along the way, however.

"While the department was well-stocked on assorted road treatment materials, we wanted to ensure we did not run out," Eady said. "Even with the best planning, hiccups can occur as they did on the first day of the weather event."

Two crew members were stuck in the Interstate 285 traffic near the fifth runway tunnel near Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport for several hours in route to retrieve salt and sand material to treat the priority areas, he said.

"A few of the employees scheduled in for second shift were unable to report due to the poor road conditions near their homes so those already on shift held over to get the job done, taking short naps in between the service calls," Eady said.

Road closures were limited to two citywide where the grade was too steep to allow for safe travels, he said.

Playing Monday morning quarterback days after the weather returned to normal for January, Eady said that, while hindsight is always 20-20, he is pleased with his department's response.

"It was impressive to see these guys working," he said.