

Ready for Mother Nature

With no more than flurries in Environment Canada's long range forecast, Dick Spear, the man who keeps the streets, sidewalks and Town of Halton Hills parking lots clear, is happy. "You said we dodged the bullet so far and we did - I love this forecast," Spear said last week as he faced a wet, but warm weekend and a forecast of more of the same.

Ever vigilant and prepared for whatever Mother Nature has in store this winter, Spear, Supervisor of Public Works, gets four Weather Network updates daily. (Paggers are apparently passé; it's all BlackBerry or cell phone.) Forecast accuracy has been "pretty good" in past years, although some storms materialized with no notice.

A winter crew of approximately 30 workers began shift work hours last week for around the clock coverage. Until its snows, they are clearing litter, repairing potholes and roads and doing vehicle maintenance on the Town's fleet, which includes 17 or 18 tandem trucks with ploughs, four smaller trucks, two graders, six or seven units for 25 municipal parking lots - seven in Acton - and multi-use pathways, and three or four pickup trucks.

All Town roads are cleared after every major storm, and cul-de-sacs are initially ploughed to make a path in and out, and smaller vehicles usually return the next day to clear them.

He said if they get salt down in the parking lots fast enough, it bares the asphalt and they don't

have to plough. "If we have to plough, we bare it off and then salt," Spear said, adding after approximately 10 to 15-centimetres of snow they start to plough the parking lots and back streets after the collectors and arterial roads are taken care of, including Queen-Young-Mill Streets.

"We have what we call a salt route up there that takes care of Churchill Road, McDonald Boulevard over to Wallace Street out to Main Street... our collector and arterial roads," Spear said, adding they also salt Main Street and the steep hills at Victoria, Brock and Kingham.

A rolling five-year average predicts the Town will respond to 16 storm-related events this winter, on par with last January, February and March,



FROZEN GREETING: Light dusting of snow greeted Acton Tuesday morning. - Marie Shadbolt photo

which Spear described as a "typical winter" which left them in "pretty good shape" financially for this winter's storms.

As a courtesy, the Town asks homeowners clear

the sidewalk in front of their houses, making it safer for kids and adults. To make it easier for Town crews, overnight parking is banned between 2 a.m. and 6

a.m., from November 15th to April 15th.

The Town budgeted \$1.3-million for snow clearing this year, and to date has spent just over \$1-million.

Giving on a tight budget is possible

Will shoppers show restraint this year?

As global economic woes continue, holiday spending remains difficult to predict. In 2010, holiday spending rose more than five percent from the year before. That increase surprised forecasters, many of whom predicted holiday spending would decline for the fifth straight year.

With the holiday season

on the horizon once again, no one truly knows what consumer response will be. But many consumers figure to exercise some restraint this holiday season, sticking to a budget when buying gifts for family and friends. While budgets are good ways to limit spending, a holiday spending budget doesn't mean shoppers can't still put a smile on their loved ones' faces. In fact, with a few tips, holiday shoppers can

stick to their budgets and still enjoy a happy holiday season.

- **Get creative:** Holiday gifts don't have to be bought at the local mall or from an online retailer. Gift-givers with unique talents can create their own gifts and save some money along the way. For example, shoppers skilled at woodworking can create a personalized wood carving for a friend or family member. Good at knitting? Knit a scarf, mittens or even a blanket for a loved one who lives in a cold weather

region. Such personalized gifts are often especially meaningful to their recipients, who appreciate the time and effort such keepsakes take to create.

- **Be patient:** Nowadays, many families are so spread out geographically that they don't always get together on Christmas Day. If that's the case and you won't be seeing your family until a few days after Christmas, take advantage of the special sales offered in the days after the actual holiday. Items are often heavily discounted, and if you can

stay patient, your patience might just pay off with substantial savings.

- **Set limits:** Establish spending rules with family members before the shopping season begins. In an effort to reduce some of the financial burden of the holiday season, many families have begun to place spending limits on holiday shopping. This saves everyone money and ensures no one finds themselves with substantial debt come the New Year.

- **Do a gift exchange with family and friends:** Many larger families have also begun to do a gift exchange rather than asking members of the family to buy gifts for each and every member of the family. In a gift

exchange, each member of the family draws a name out of a hat and then only buys a gift for that specific person. This even has the added benefit of allowing shoppers to buy something a little more expensive for a family member since they aren't obligated to buy gifts for anyone else.

- **Start early:** The earlier you begin your holiday shopping, the more you can spread out your spending. This reduces the financial stress of the season while still allowing shoppers to get something special for everyone on their shopping list.

Holiday spending may or may not increase this holiday season. But savvy shoppers can still make the most of their spending without breaking the bank.

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