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From Buffalo to Birmingham

H&S Weathers the Winter of '77

Lawnmowers and crabgrass have replaced snow shovels and slush. Soon everyone will be rushing to the beach complaining about the unbearable heat. But it will take a long, hot summer to make many of us forget the brutal winter of '77, which sent a chill down the backbones of Americans from Milwaukee to Miami. At H&S, being snowed under had a double meaning this year since Mother Nature sent most of her blinding snow, frigid temperatures and blustery winds during the busy season.

Meeting the challenge of those dismal days of winter, H&S people in our practice offices across the country pulled together and managed to continue serving clients under the most difficult conditions.

The expression it's either too hot or too cold has special meaning for the people in our Buffalo office. They had barely recovered from an October fire that forced them to move out of their office building for two weeks when the snows came. And nowhere in the country did they come faster or harder than in Buffalo. The worst storm hit the metropolitan area on January 28. The city, already covered with several feet of snow, was hit with a new layer, and driving winds piled drifts as high as fifteen feet.

Many H&S people, unable to make their way home in the storm, spent the night at clients, with friends or in hotels. PIC Al White, partners Jim Clyde and Don Currie, staff accountant John Beattie and receptionist Karen Stellrecht had to spend the night in our practice office. "It wasn't too bad," John recalls. "There was a restaurant in the building, so we were able to get a good dinner. After that, we just went back to the office and worked on some taxes." They managed to get out about 11:00 a.m. the next day with the assistance of a telephone company worker who let Al White know which routes were open to traffic. Although Jim Clyde was forced to abandon his car on the thruway and hitch a ride home, everyone got home safely that day, a Saturday.

The practice office, like most businesses in Buffalo, was closed for several days, but H&S managed to maintain close contact with clients by phone. Most people were able to get to the office for one day soon after the big snowfall and brought work home. Even after some of the roads were cleared, there were still restrictions on driving. Buffalo residents were required to ride in car pools of three or more people unless they were providing essential services such as medical care, food or banking.

"We are a close-knit office," secretary Wanda Welsh said, "so we had no trouble organizing car pools over the phone. And some staff members were able to ride in with clients such as bankers who had special passes. It was not until February 11 that things pretty much returned to normal." So while no one in Buffalo was able to maintain business as usual during the storm and its aftermath, people at H&S worked to keep the interruption to a minimum and to ensure the best service possible to our clients.

Two inches of snow on the ground and a temperature of minus five degrees might sound like a mild spring day in Buffalo, but in Birmingham, Alabama, they seem like blizzard conditions. Until this year, the record snowfall in that city was the half inch that buried the city during the infamous winter of '47. Because of the lack of snow-removal equipment and drivers who didn't have snow tires or chains and weren't used to driving on icy roads, businesses in Birmingham were virtually inoperative for two days. Four people were able to make it into the H&S office the first day of the storm and eight the next day. With the aid of some tire chains, staff members were able to travel to an engagement in Montgomery, which was blanketed in five inches of snow.

PIC Ed Powers, one of the few people in Birmingham who owns a set of tire chains, thought he wouldn't have much trouble getting to the office after the snowfall. But as he started out of his driveway, his path was blocked, not by a fifteen-foot snowdrift, but by a steady stream of sleds tearing down the hill in front of his house. The children of Birmingham finally got a chance to try a sport that the children of Buffalo consider a regular pastime. "After a couple of days the snow melted and businesses were able to reopen," Ed said, "but I still can't figure out what all those sleds were doing in Birmingham."