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Readers: Snow heroes abound in central Illinois

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It's been a tough week in central Illinois, thanks to Old Man Winter. More than a foot of snow, blustery winds and bitter temperatures left many begging for mercy and ready to hibernate indoors until spring.

But there were glimmers of hope among the snowdrifts. Throughout the region, friends, family members, neighbors and perfect strangers pitched in – without being asked and with no expectation of pay – to help others when they needed it most. They pushed cars out of snow banks, shoveled driveways, plowed the streets, loaned their snow blowers, checked on their neighbors and much more.

SJ-R.com readers far and wide this week shared their stories of "snow heroes" from the blizzard of 2011.

So to all the Good Samaritans out there, we salute you and your shovels. You make central Illinois a great place to live – even in January.

If you have a "snow heroes" story, share it in the comments section below.

I don't know the man's name, but he is the ex-husband of my neighbor across the street. We live on Partridge Road, in the unincorporated old Meadowbrook subdivision. The streets here are barely wide enough for two cars to pass, there are no sidewalks, and many of the driveways slope either up or downhill.

My wife called a commercial snow removal company (Wednesday) morning to stop by later in the afternoon and plow out our driveway, but before this could happen, our neighbor's ex-husband pulled up in front of her house in a big pickup truck pulling a Bobcat. He unloaded the Bobcat and started to plow her driveway. Mind that the township had not even come by at this point (about 2:00 pm) to plow the street for the first time since the snow fell.

My wife called several of the neighbors to try to find out who the Bobcat operator was, and after leaving a message, his ex-wife called us and told us he'd probably have time to stop by and plow our drive. Not only did he do ours, but he did the entire street and I believe most of the residents' driveways. I think there are 10 houses on our street, and I know he removed snow from at least seven, in addition to clearing the street.

Thank you, Mr. Bobcat operator, for your skill, time, and generosity.

Richard Herndon
Springfield

I'd like to nominate my neighbor Curt Snow (coincidence lol) of North 16th Street. He cleared our driveway with a snow blower last night and (Wednesday) morning without us asking. When my husband, Nick, got our car stuck in the road, he helped shovel and push it back into our driveway. Then when we realized our car wasn't going anywhere, he drove my husband to get his paycheck and supplies because he has four-wheel drive. He wouldn't even take gas money!

Curt spent the entire day out clearing driveways throughout the neighborhood and helping any and everyone he saw stuck, asking nothing in return. Curt is a true snow hero, American, and model of humanity, and truly deserves recognition.

Jenifer Ginos
Springfield

Mike Kotner of North Fourth Street is our neighborhood "snow hero." He has used his snow blower for every snow this season to clear driveways for myself and a few others! My daughter and I watched out the window as he (and he is no spring chicken :O) helped a man in a pick up get unstuck for at least a good 30 minutes.

If it weren't for his efforts it is doubtful my husband would have been able to get to and from work. He is not only our snow hero, he is our fall hero, mowing and mulching leaves for neighbors, and our summer and spring hero doing anything he can to help and always having a nice frosty beverage available!!

Dana Shepherd
Springfield

I would like to nominate all of my neighbors – the Stiches, the Anallas, Sarah Gennicks, the Borskis – and especially JJ Borski, who tirelessly and generously spent his 39th birthday digging out his neighbors, bypassing his birthday breakfast to help others. Thank you to all and happy birthday JJ!

Dana, Taylor and Gabe Ingram
Athens

I would like to nominate my husband, Kevin Becker, for snow hero.

On any major snow fall he is out plowing drives and streets. We live in New Berlin, and sometimes it can take a while before we get any help. Kevin bundles up and heads out, spending most of the day helping friends, neighbors and complete strangers. He usually takes the day off work when we are getting a big snow, never taking any money unless someone is VERY persistent.

He's my kind-hearted polar bear. What I love the most is that he's teaching our son the same kind of values – helping others.

Amy Becker
New Berlin

I would like to nominate my next-door neighbor, Geoff McCormick, as a snow hero.

He not only cleared my driveway once during the blizzard, but twice. He saw me trying to shovel my driveway and told me he would take care of it with his snow blower. I also had my car stuck and couldn't get my car into my garage. After he cleared my driveway, he got my car unstuck and put it in my garage for me.

He helps out other neighbors as well and expects nothing in return. I couldn't ask for a better neighbor than Geoff. I am a single lady living alone and he always goes out of his way to help me out. He is definitely a snow hero and I greatly appreciate all that he does for me.

Debora Basso
Southern View

I appreciate all the drivers from Public Works keeping our roads safe. I just don't think people realize what those guys through to keep our roads clean.

Brian Bowles
Springfield (via Facebook)

Our amazing landlord Ken Easterday plowed our driveway for us and the neighbors. He did this just in time for me to have to run my husband to the ER for a sledding accident. So very thankful because otherwise we would have been stuck!

Missy Fischer Deverick
Springfield (via Facebook)

Our hero is Mike Taft. He is always there to dig us out. We live out in the country with a long driveway, and the Big Dig after the blizzard was over a foot deep with drifts. Mike showed up with his farm tractor and loader and dug us out. He's the best. Thank you, Mike.

Vicki Wallace
Springfield (via Facebook)

My snow hero of 2011 is my best friend who serves at Camp Lincoln. Capt. Jeff Hicks was one of the men out at Camp Lincoln coordinating the men and women for the snow emergency that was in place. He spent many hours planning and working some of the logistics out of what and where the needs are.

He did not do this on his own. All the men and women he worked with also go hand in hand in being snow heroes by taking their time away from their families to ensure that Illinoisans were safe and out of Mother Nature's harm.

Even though I am here in St Louis, our National Guardsmen here reminded me that our military are heroes everyday, whether it be overseas or in our backyards!

Thank you Jeff and other members of Camp Lincoln for your hard work and dedication the past 48 hours for ensuring the safety of those in central Illinois!

Rachel Hager, St. Louis
Originally from Taylorville

I want to nominate my neighbor Roy Hinds of Athens. He used his snow blower to clean out my and two other neighbors' driveways. He also cleaned around our mailboxes so that the mail could be delivered. He used his time and effort to help others and I really appreciate all his efforts!

Diane Sybert
Athens

I live in Williamsville, and we have a lot of heroes, although they would not think so. I would like to thank the group from the Williamsville Christian Church – my church – for the time they spent Wednesday digging out countless driveways and sidewalks throughout our town. They drove around and when they saw a need, they dug in and did the job.

Although I know these special people, they helped others who may not have known them. I only hope those who received their services not only were relieved but received a blessing.

A big heartfelt thanks Melinda, Dave, Clint and Darb.

Carol Harris
Williamsville

Early (Wednesday) morning there was a knock on my door. Could not imagine who could be there since my drive was full of ice and snow. There stood Bart Wilson from down the road making sure that I was all right and had heat. He told me he would be back with the tractor when the wind stopped blowing to plow me out. Bless his heart.

When he came, my neighbor, Wayne Sathoff, across the road came also. While Bart was plowing, Wayne was clearing in front of the garage and my sidewalk. What a wonderful place to live. Of course, it would be better with not quite so much bad weather, but you can't have everything.

Thank you to these wonderful neighbors. Also, thank you SJ-R for giving me this opportunity to thank them publicly.

Phyllis White
Pawnee

I would like to recognize my husband, Aaron Deckard, for "snow hero."

On Feb. 2, when everyone was shoveling, snow blowing, plowing, etc. their driveways and streets, he was busy snow blowing the driveways and sidewalks for most of our street. He worked very hard for several hours before having to go into work, and when he got home later that evening he helped neighbors again.

He put his driveway last and made sure everyone that has difficulty getting out to do the hard work was finished first.

Holly Deckard
Springfield

Personally, I'd like to call him my "snow angel." After a few hours of work clearing half of our double driveway with an old snow blower, a guy in a pickup equipped with a plow pulled up and cleared all the snow piled up in front of our driveway by the city plows. I was going to do that part of the dig-out last, but this Good Samaritan did it with one swipe of his plow.

I thanked him profusely. He said, "No problem," and took off. Thanks again, my friend. You really made my day.

Holly Hansen
Springfield

George Krebs, Clint Warnisher, Darb Calvert and Dave Beals went around to several places in Williamsville, including my mom's house, and shoveled them out. (I live out in the country and couldn't get to Williamsville.)

They're just a great group of guys from Williamsville Christian Church, and they go around helping people around town just to let them know they care! My mom tried to pay them, but they preferred a hug instead!

AND to two of my neighbors who plowed us out with their tractors – Mike Cox and Bryan Myerhoff. Thanks so much guys! You're the best!!

Laura Polk
Sherman

Our next-door neighbor, Bruce, has been using his snow blower on several driveways and sidewalks in our cul de sac all winter – not just for this storm. He just gets out there and does it, not asking for anything in return. In several cases, we don't have snow blowers, so a snow like this one would be a lot of work, especially for seniors, or most would have to pay someone.

It's nice to know that kind neighbors like Bruce are still out there!

Steve & Lee Ann Schoeffel
Springfield

My story is nothing special, but where I live we have a shared driveway. Our neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. Gardener, were kind enough to shovel the whole thing for us, which is great because my husband recently had hernia surgery and I hurt my back after I tried to shovel off some of the snow.

Also, our roommate, Steve Gifford and Peter Barmes shoveled the drive during the storm. I hope it made it easier for Mr. and Mrs. Gardener the next day.

Catherine Black
Springfield

Alan Janssen of Greenview spent the best part of Wednesday going around Greenview in his Bobcat. He cleaned out many driveways and would not accept any thing for all the time he spent.

His Bobcat consumes a lot of fuel, but he's just good-hearted and a great neighbor.

Rick Setzer
Greenview

My snow hero is a man in a silver Lexus who was driving down Mason Street Tuesday afternoon and pulled over just to help me scrape my car. He must have seen me struggling in the parking lot and went out of his way to help without even being asked. His help allowed me to get home safely. Thank you!

My other snow hero is my husband, Darren Volle, who is actually shown in the picture on your Website. He's the guy in the red hat walking down South Columbia. He spent hours shoveling out the street so our neighbors could get out in an emergency, along with our neighbor Ryan and his snow blower, which was a great help to us as the plows didn't make it to South Columbia until 10:30 p.m. I feel so lucky.

Meredith Volle
Springfield

My neighbor's son, John Connor, did a shovel job that would make the most experienced snow blower (and all the neighbors) envious! After he got a ride to/from work from his wife in a four-wheel-drive, he proceeded to shovel-out his car and his father's minivan.

If that wasn't enough, he shoveled a clear space the width of the property from the sidewalk all the way to the street for parking. Jack's front yard looks like a mountain range as a result of all the displaced snow, but they shouldn't have any issues with getting stuck. What a great job!

Molly Darling
Springfield

I don't have a specific person to nominate, but rather a group. I live in Jerome on West Iles Avenue and would like to say a huge thank you to the Jerome village street crew.

They worked tirelessly all night Tuesday night plowing our streets, and when I woke up yesterday morning, all of the roads were clear and passable. I think they all deserve a big high-five for their efforts in keeping the streets of Jerome clear so we could all get out with no problem during the storm. I drove around Jerome (Wednesday) afternoon, and there wasn't a street in my neighborhood that had snow on it.

Just wanted to say thanks. All of you did a great job, and I really appreciate it!!

Rich Whiting
Jerome

I live in Greenview, a small community of 850 residents 25 miles north of Springfield. Wednesday morning, like thousands of other Illinois residents, I woke up to around 15 inches of snow and ice on the ground all around me.

It wasn't long until I heard the roar of tractors and snow plows driving by and the scooping sounds of snow being pushed away to clear driveways and sidewalks.

Pretty soon friends were speaking on Facebook of an unknown person who was driving around town on a skid loader clearing out driveways and alleyways so people could navigate and get out of their garages. They said, "Who is that masked man?" One answered, "I don't know, but he just cleared our drive, and my husband offered him money, but he would not take it."

He must have cleared out three quarters of the town's drives and alleyways. This is nothing unusual for him, though. He has been doing this for years. This unknown person is Allen Janssen, also known as A.J., owner of Janssen Concrete. He uses his skid loader to scoop, shovel and push that snow out of the way. Believe me, without him I would still be trying to get out of my garage this spring, as there were 6-foot drifts of snow in my driveway.

Don't get me wrong there are several others that were out there scooping and removing snow as well, but they were mainly helping their families or immediate neighbors. A.J. helps everyone!

Removing that much snow is no easy job that is why he is our (the town of Greenview) snow hero.

You can say what you want about small hick towns, but it is times like these that I appreciate living in this very small town where people care about people and are still there to help you in your time of need.

Thanks, A.J. You are the best!

Mary S. Kirby
Greenview

My snow heroes are Trey and George Castles next door.

Wednesday morning I woke up to the sound of snow-shovel scraping noises on my front walk. My neighbors trudged through like 15 inches of snow to scoop my walk out to the street. Trey said, "We didn't know if you were home, but we scooped it out anyway. However, we don't know what to tell you about your garage and getting your car out." I said that is fine, I appreciate you scooping my walks.

That wasn't enough ... then about 3 p.m. I heard the sounds of a snow blower starting up out front. I looked out and again it was Trey running his snow blower on my walk all around the side of the house to the garage. I am so grateful for them, as I have been having major back problems this fall and winter and am unable to scoop snow.

Not only are they my snow heroes, they are my all-year-round heroes. A couple of years ago a lady was driving by on Route 29 and fell asleep at the wheel and drove off into my yard. She managed to miss the tree in the corner of the yard and missed hitting the side of my house as her car hit the embankment and rolled over and landed her back bumper on my back door step. My neighbors happened to be outside leaving for work and school at the time and heard someone yelling, "Help me." They immediately came to her aid and managed to get her out of her car through her trunk. She was unhurt but badly shaken up of course. If it had not been for their quick response she may have had to stay trapped inside her car for several more minutes while a rescue unit was obtained.

We may not have a grocery store or a hardware store anymore, but we sure have good-doers who aren't afraid to go the extra mile to help a neighbor out.

My neighbors are awesome, and you won't find that kind of neighbor just anywhere, but you will find them in Greenview.

Mary S. Kirby
Greenview resident

Yesterday my girlfriend's son, Brandon Scrimsher, and his wife, Amanda, dug several people out of the snow as they encountered them. He has a Jeep, so they were able to not only be present at one of their jobs assisting a homebound paraplegic man who was facing being left unassisted since most of his assistants were unable to get their cars out, but they also stopped to help people that they saw along the way.

Ted Keylon
Springfield

I want to say thank you to two gentlemen from B&B Electric who stopped and helped me. I backed into a snow drift and managed to get stuck in my driveway. The B & B van was approaching a stop sign, but they backed up and offered to help. They could have just gone on about their business, but they brought a shovel and helped dig my car out and get me back on the road.

Thank you so much, gentlemen. I am going to call B&B Electric the next time I need an electrician.

Connie O'Sullivan

Darrell Jackson, the chief dispatcher at the city garage, that organized and motivated his "troops" to clear all this snow.

Dr. Jack Fyans
Springfield

I would like to nominate Josphine Marqez as a snow hero. She is an active and very helping student at the University of Illinois in Springfield. She is one of the few students who has been prepared with a shovel and used every opportunity to help out.

Wednesday, I went out to shovel my car, and she came out to help me. There were other students doing the same, so she shoveled out their cars before even going to her own! She helped shovel at least four cars and lent out her supplies at night when neighbors needed it as well.

I think her helping spirit reflects the kind of model we should all have when faced with difficult conditions. It is especially inspiring for youth to show selflessness in a society that continually stresses "me, me, me."

Itzi Llamas
Springfield

We got a lot of snow just outside of Springfield. At 11 a.m. Tuesday, my son, Scott Hurley, and his friend, Mike Strode, helped push one of the residents out of the snow in our subdivision. They were out for two and a half hours trying to get her home. The snowplows had not been through, and people were getting stuck left and right.

My son and his friend saw one of the neighbors stuck in one of the streets by our house, and he saw that she had two kids in the car with her. He and his friend pushed the neighbor's car and shoveled the street until they found an empty drive, and they shoveled the snow out of the drive and parked her car into another drive until she could come back to get it the next morning.

They did not leave her stranded. They were truly heroes in my eye.

Reta Hurley
Springfield

I have a few snow heroes in the last couple of days. True heroes!

First and foremost, a young man came along and pulled me out of a snowdrift this morning. I was on West Washington Street, spun out and wound up in a snow bank one block from my client's office.

I called my roadside assistance number only to find my policy only covers tow trucks for mechanical damage, not being dragged out of a snow bank. So I made some calls and arranged to have it pulled out at my own expense. The tow company said they were extremely busy and that someone would be there to help me before noon. It was right around 8 a.m.

Then, before too long, a nice young person named Dave Wilcox happened along in a van and asked me if I need help. I informed him a tow was on the way; he said he had a tow belt so why not give it a go? Dave got on his back on the ground to hook my car up. I was stuck inside because the snow I was in was packed from snowplows and covered the bottom half of my door.

Prior to that, three separate men, obviously on their way to work, stopped and offered to push me out. They tried and couldn't.

Secondly, two neighbors (a young man and his wife whom I don't know) and a roommate (John Newby) and two other friends from a few blocks away helped dig me out of the drift my car was in after the huge snow. It took five or six strong young men to shovel me out.

I am a 50-year-old out-of-shape male. I have bad knees and a bad back from when I broke it years ago. I would still be stuck right now if not for the kindness of random strangers in Springfield. I grew up in suburban Chicago and suburban Detroit, and I can tell you this: in the big cities, no one would come to help without being paid. Depending on where one was stuck, robbery would be a definite possibility.

Makes me proud to live in Springfield. God bless the aforementioned people and all the people of Springfield!

Terry Lindquist
Springfield

My snow hero is Mark Gannar of Chatham. Every time there is a measurable amount of snow he will plow everyone's driveway on our street. This blizzard was no exception! The day of the blizzard he was out and the day after he came and plowed my driveway. I think he spent an hour on mine alone.

He is such a huge help to us and all of the people on our street. I know they all appreciate him as much as I do!

Amanda M. Workman
Chatham

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