

A Nearly Perfect New Years Eve

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“Happy New Year”. How many times have we all heard that phrase in the past few months? However, just because people always say something and use certain ‘catch lines’, certainly doesn’t make those same expressions come true. This was certainly the case this New Years Eve past. While working in the Utility office at 1:00 in the afternoon, our “Building Development Manager”, Bode Cavallaro, came into my office to discuss who would be “On Call” for the Holiday. What ensued was a conversation basically about what each of our plans were for the big “New Years Eve Parties”. Remarkably, we both were going to be doing about the same thing, staying at home having a nice relaxing quiet evening. Since neither one of us would be doing anything special we left the on call system unchanged. I would be the person called in case of problems. Before Bode left the office that day however, he said if I needed his help for anything just give him a call. He would be happy to assist in any way he could. Little did he know at that time what he would be getting himself into. The rest of the afternoon went along without any major problems, come to think about it there weren’t any small problems either. Kind of like the calm before the storm I suppose. We didn’t even have a complaint about “poor water pressure”, “there’s sand in my water”, or any other of the usual complaints.

At about 3:00 in the afternoon the Storm started to settle in. Not a storm of problems, this was a literal snow storm. It began snowing profusely. At times a complete white out!!! The only thing that I dislike more than snow at my house and workplace, is lots of it. If there is one thing I never exaggerate about, it’s about how much snow is falling. That’s because it is always too much if “me” is also involved in the same sentence. However, snow was not the real problem this day. It was only the instigator in a much larger, grander scheme of things to come.

The afternoon slowly changed to quitting time with everything still going well. I made my final rounds and felt confident that every thing would keep right on running smooth until I would be back the

following morning, New Years Day 2004. Evidently as I was driving home from the resort some young guests that were staying with their parents in one of our condos, had a different type of evening in mind for this New Years Eve. Their (names withheld on purpose to keep me from harming them) fun and games began about 10:00 in the evening. While Mom and Dad were busy at a party, these 15, and 16 year olds got the keys to the motor home. Their Joy ride lasted almost an hour. Sliding around corners, spinning circles in parking lots, a laughing they did go. Until they lost control of their home on wheels. The giggles must have stopped almost as abruptly as their vehicle did.

Here is a good trivia question for all of you who read this. In a contest between a Motor Home and a Fire Hydrant, who wins? The answer of course, is neither one. There is no clear winner, however, there is a sure loser. That is the poor Utility worker who at that very moment was sitting in his hot tub having a glass of champagne with his wife. The cell phone rang at 10:47 P.M. My wife could hear the frantic voice on the other end of the conversation as I was getting out of the hot tub and into my work clothes. “Just a water leak”, I said to her casually. They always tend to exaggerate water leaks. One time a “Main Line Break”, that had been reported by the night security person, turned out to be a sprinkler head off at the real estate office. “Its probably something that we will laugh about at the next employee awards meeting”, I said as I threw on my coat. “I don’t know”, said my wife, “he sounded pretty excited to me”.

When I was about half way to the resort, the phone chirped again. “Where are you?”, came the excited voice, “we’ve got a major disaster here.” “Almost there”, I offered, hoping to calm the distraught front desk clerk.

While pulling on to the resort, I was confronted with a scene that was truly indescribable. If you can imagine a movie scene with a lot of flares, red lights, people all over the road, and of course snow. And one unbelievable amount of water. Its amazing how much water comes out of the ground where a fire hydrant once peacefully and proudly stood. Also, the ground shakes like a major earthquake is happening just below your feet. We found the shut off valve that controls that hydrant and turned it off, so the water flow slowly stopped. However, due to

the surge from the break and our 3 booster pumps kicking on due to lack of pressure, our system had faced major surge and water hammer. As our pressure began to build after stopping the hydrant leak, another leak showed itself in our booster station. The time now was 11:55 when I dialed Bode. You never know what to expect when you call someone at midnight, but especially on New Years Eve. Needless to say Bode came right out and helped me locate the valves necessary to isolate the leaks and then to fix them. By the time we were finished, 2 leaks and by now 4:30 A.M., we were soaked, exhausted, cold and delirious. I know we had to be near the point of collapse because when we got ready to leave the last leak repaired, I said “Happy New Year” to Bode. In unison we both started laughing and giggling like a couple of school girls. What a night, and what a way to start out a new year.

A few days later, we had a nice debriefing meeting to assess what we did right and what we will change whenever this happens again. There are a few things I would like to pass on to others about this experience. Things that I learned the hard way.

#1 Learn where all your necessary valves are located. They are very hard to find under 2 feet of snow or 8 inches of ice. I have now begun to make an atlas of locations.

#2 Make sure your night crew or security person knows what to do first. The first few minutes and procedures are by far the most critical. Not only in handling the problem, but in protecting your system from further damage.

#3 Learn to roll with the problems, and remember, just when you think it’s over, it may just be starting.

Finally above all else, have a “Happy New Year”. I hope your “party” was better than mine.

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