

PRESS RELEASE

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Bittersweet: Bloemer retires after 29 years of public works, snow plowing and memories

DE PERE, WIS. – Get tired of shoveling out your driveway? Most people do after a long winter. Now, imagine not only clearing snow from your driveway – but worrying about creating safe passage in winter for more than one hundred thousand linear feet of other roads, alleys and parking lots throughout the City all winter long.

And not just for one winter, but in every snowfall for more than a quarter century.

Such has been the responsibility of Steve Bloemer, the City of De Pere's street superintendent, who is retiring this Friday, March 29, after 28 ½ years of service to the community.

"This has been a great career for me, and my family. I was very lucky to have served the residents of the City of De Pere," Bloemer said.



Bloemer began his career in De Pere in 1984 – not for public works, but with a part-time job as a paid, on-call firefighter. From there, he was eventually hired fulltime in Sept. 1990 for public works, and worked in the street division.

This opportunity meant a lot to Bloemer. He had worked on a farm as a teenager and always had a fondness for outdoor work. But in adulthood, he found himself employed for a period of time at an area paper mill. While he enjoyed this, he yearned to get back outside.

De Pere Public Works gave him that opportunity, for which he is grateful. It turns out, however, that his work outside in De Pere would bring him face-to-face with practically every weather scenario imaginable; some far worse than others.

"In my career, the worst thing to contend with was a blizzard-type snowstorm, with whiteout conditions. It's terrible. Sometimes, you don't even know for sure if you should be out there with a plow truck," Bloemer said. "But if we weren't out there, these roads would be completely shut down. And in the event of an emergency for fire and police, the roads would be impassable."

Bloemer doesn't have to think back far to remember one such notable, awful event.

“On April 14, 2018 - that dumped over 23 inches of snow in De Pere over three days at a time, when everyone basically thought that winter was over,” Bloemer said. “That was one of the most memorable events I’ve encountered.”

While combatting winter weather may be a notable aspect of his job, it’s far from his only responsibility as street superintendent. In fact, Bloemer is incredibly busy all year managing different services for residents.

When residents pull their garbage and recycling to the curb, Bloemer is behind the scenes, coordinating pick-up daily. When the leaves begin to fall each October, Bloemer is readying his crews for brush pick-up and leaf collection. He also oversees pothole patching, fixing storm inlets, and the rubbish collection site, not to mention Christmas tree pick-up, jetting out sewer lines and, well, the list goes on.

There’s always so much to do to take care of De Pere’s streets. And so much has changed over the years, too, according to Bloemer.

“Garbage was done totally by hand when I started. We were jumping out of the truck and throwing bags in. There was no automation for anything. We also didn’t do recycling either when I first started here,” he said.

One thing that has remained constant, though, was the overall support he felt from City residents. Sure, there were complaints over the years about leaves, or snow, or potholes, which is understandable. But De Pere residents have overall been very gracious and understanding about the efforts of himself and his staff, Bloemer said. And he appreciates this support.

“It’s a very challenging job. We’re out there trying to keep the roads in the best shape possible, especially during a storm. They’re never going to be perfect, but we’re out there doing the best we can,” Bloemer said.

Speaking of best; looking back, another proud moment for Bloemer was in 2008, when he and coworker Tim Jonet won first place in the annual Wisconsin American Public Works Association Snow Plow Rodeo, held at Lambeau Field. Winning this test of efficiency, speed and precision was no small feat, considering competition included 67 teams from all over Wisconsin. It is De Pere’s only victory ever at this event.

Public Works Director Scott Thoresen said Bloemer’s win is one of the proudest moments he has had for one of his employees at the City, noting Bloemer has long been an exceptionally skilled and dedicated individual, who has served De Pere well for almost 30 years.

“We appreciate all he’s done for our department and for the residents of De Pere. We will miss Steve and the high-level of commitment and effort he’s shown to this City, and wish him well in the next chapter of his life,” Thoresen said.

As far as what that next chapter is? Bloemer’s not exactly sure yet -- but he does know one thing:

“I do know that next winter it will look much prettier when it starts to snow. Throughout my whole career, raising two kids, when it was snowing, dad was working. Snowfalls were not enjoyable. Not in this career. But, I can look out the window in 2020, maybe for the first time in 29 years, and see the beauty of it; I can just sit back, and enjoy it.”