

Ice storm mars Christmas celebration

By Mark Pavilons

This year's Christmas celebration was anything but merry for thousands of residents across York Region.

The massive ice storm that swept across Ontario left hundreds of thousands without power, downed trees and damaged homes and vehicles.

Virtually no area of King was left unscathed, as many mature trees suffered damage.

In King, the ice storm, which began Dec. 22, caused power failures and shortages that started at roughly 2 a.m. that day.

Power was still out in some isolated rural areas Dec. 26.

At the start of the ice storm, more than 600,000 customers were without power in Ontario.

King's Fire and Emergency Services have been responding effectively to all calls received. Township crews have been working steadily to maintain roads, which are in good condition allowing affected residents to travel to unaffected areas. Crews have also been checking King's water and sanitary sewer systems which are also functioning well. Sidewalk snow clearing has commenced, however, crews are experiencing delays as they continue to deal with fallen branches.

Clean up resulting from fallen trees and tree limbs will take some time. The Township will be providing additional yard waste collection services the week of Jan. 27. Details will be provided on the Township's web site and in local newspapers as the arrangements with service provider are finalized.

Township facilities were open to residents looking for a place to warm up while they were without power.

"We appreciate the co-operation we have received from all residents and businesses as we work through the storm's effects and encourage everyone who is able to check on friends and neighbours," according to the Township's website. "We appreciate the significant efforts expended by our staff and Hydro One crews as they worked through challenging conditions to restore service as quickly as they did given the widespread effects of the storm."

The lights started to flicker in King City at roughly 10 p.m. Dec. 21, according to Councillor Cleve Mortelliti, who said damage to trees was widespread in his ward.

"Across the road from us the branches of a large tree began slumping over the power lines and we could see arcing beginning to occur with smoke and flames jumping off the lines and igniting the tree limb. Then Hydro One showed up with a cherry picker to try and cut some of the limbs. But before they managed to do this the sky lit up bright blue with this incredibly loud arcing and buzzing sound and the power went off up and down the street. Hydro One cut the tree branches off the line and turned the power back on."

The sky lit up again he said at 2 a.m. and the power went and didn't come on again until Sunday evening. That lasted about five minutes when "something blew up again." Power did not come on until late Monday.

His home backs onto Memorial Park and Sunday morning he heard the sound of heavy branches cracking and crashing to the ground all over all over the neighborhood.

"It looks like a small tornado blew threw the area with all the broken and downed trees," he observed.

Ward 2 Councillor Peter Grandilli said residents called him "stressed out" by power outages.

He himself lost power on and off both Saturday and Sunday. Then Sunday evening, while he was enjoying a soccer game on TV, the power went off again. He was lucky in that he has a fireplace.

He too, heard the loud crashing noises of falling tree branches, some of which blocked his driveway.

He had to reschedule one of his family gatherings and they got their power back Thursday morning.

Patty Fleetwood, of the Nobleton Village Association, said there were lots of trees down in Nobleton.

She said she heard two large booms and thought a tree had come down on the roof, but didn't find anything. She then heard about the phenomenon known as "frost quakes," a rare occurrence that takes place when water seeps into the ground, freezes and expands rapidly, causing an earthquake-like effect.

"I went for a drive through town and was amazed at the tree damage," she said.

Fortunately, the weekend thaw helped save many trees that were in danger of being permanently damaged.