

City Council examines new snow plow/dump truck



PHOTOS BY ERIC A. JOHNSON

Members of Geneva City Council examine the Streets Department's new \$105,000 6-ton International 7400 snow plow/dump truck during a special Work Session presentation in the fire department apparatus bay.

Department's salt usage, employee overtime spike with recent snows

BY ERIC A. JOHNSON
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GENEVA - Meeting with widespread acclaim from city administrators and City Council members alike, Streets Department superintendent Tim Bittner unveiled the department's newest fleet pride-and-joy, its \$105,000 6-ton International 7400 snow plow/dump truck, during a pre-Council work session presentation in the Geneva Fire Department's apparatus bay.

The City of Geneva's mean, green, snow-fighting machine, battle-tested during the string of snowstorms in recent weeks, is a state-of-the-art 2006 International 7400 customized to city specifications by Newell Equipment Inc. of Galion, Ohio. The truck includes a Henke torsion triple-edge 10-foot snow plow, a carbon steel Swenson Eva hopper salt spreader, a Henderson Mark II dump box with a stainless steel 9-foot bed, and a Whelen LED warning light system. Lettering on the truck was done locally by Geneva-based Bill Conrad Signs. A stainless steel salt spreader for the truck is currently on order.



City of Geneva Streets Department superintendent Tim Bittner explains the operation of the department's new truck.

"They've done a very, very nice job on this truck," Bittner said of Newell Equipment. "It's a very impressive truck..."

An exciting new feature is the truck's corrosion-resistant stainless steel truck bed and the planned addition of a stainless steel salt spreader. Hauling and spreading salt, he noted, is particularly hard on trucks, with department employees sandblasting and painting conventional truck beds an average of five times of a truck's typical 20-year lifespan.

While the cost of the new truck's stainless steel truck bed is a larger front end investment over the price of standard steel

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beds, Bittner noted the extra up front costs are more than made up for in better long-term truck appearance and the cost savings realized by eliminating the man-hours needed to regularly refurbish the dump bed.

The new 210 horsepower diesel International, driven by Streets Department employee Todd Young, replaces a 1985 GMC model. Bittner said the new truck has been "standardized" to match the equipment and capabilities of the city's other four 6-ton trucks, which are used to plow snow, salt streets, and haul dirt, stone, and debris.

Ordered last year, the snow plow/dump truck and a new street sweeper delivered last summer were the two major 2006 capital expenditures approved by Council for the Streets Department.

"Thanks for the vehicles," Bittner said. "They're very, very nice."

Councilman Rodger Fuller took full advantage of the special presentation, climbing into high truck cab and taking a seat behind the wheel of the massive 6-ton truck.

Said Fuller of the International 7400, "Absolutely, it's a great addition to the Streets Department."

Though the International is already a veteran of city snow removal and salting operations,

councilwoman Crystal Latimer was amazed at the vehicle's appearance.

Said Latimer, "It looks like it just came off the showroom floor."

At the regular City Council meeting that followed, chaired by Council vice president William Buskirk, Bittner delivered an informational presentation to Council members on the year-to-date operations of the 6-employee Streets Department, staffed by Bittner, a mechanic, and four road workers.

During the ongoing winter of 2006-07, Bittner said the Streets Department has laid 1,028 tons of salt on the city's 35 miles of streets, compared to 782 tons during the entire winter of 2005-06. Despite the significant jump in salt usage this winter, he noted overall salt costs incurred by the city are running only slightly ahead of last winter - \$34,419 to date this year versus \$31,639 in 2006 - thanks to a \$7 per ton savings as the city taps a special state group buying program. Salt costs for the city are running \$33.49 per ton this winter versus \$40.46 per ton last winter.

With the significant snowfalls experienced by the city in recent weeks, Bittner said department overtime from Jan. 1 to Feb. 26, 2007 has spiked to 186.5 hours, versus 188.5 hours of overtime incurred in all of 2006.

In response to a query from Latimer, Bittner said problem potholed city streets, most notably Ansel and Chestnut, will be cold-patched when the weather warms sufficiently to perform the temporary repair work. More permanent repairs, he said, will be made in the spring.

Reporting on department activity to date for 2007, Bittner said the department had logged: 54.5 hours cold-patching potholes; 152 hours hauling snow; 64 hours picking up 107 Christmas trees; 16 hours repairing catch basins; 22 hours washing trucks; 16 hours running electric in the Depot Street municipal parking lot; 25.5 hours removing downtown Christmas lights; 89 hours salting streets; and 188 hours plowing snow.

Observed Bittner of his road workers, "They spend a lot of hours doing a lot of different things."

In a post-meeting interview with the Gazette, Fuller said Streets Department employees are among the unsung heroes of city government.

"They do so many different things," he said. "The general public has no idea how many things they do. They do an awful lot for the community."