

# Remembering the Ice Storm

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Record Staff

**NORTH DUNDAS** – During the early morning of Jan. 4, 1998, right after the township had amalgamated into what we know today, North Dundas was about to endure its first disaster as a newly formed

township, as the sound of ice and rain tapped on residents' windows. From Jan. 4 to Jan. 10, North Dundas was at the mercy of non-stop freezing rain that shutdown services, closed roads, darkened streets and even led to dozens of fatalities throughout Ontario and Quebec.

In numbers, throughout Eastern Ontario, approximately 600,000 lost their power, 11,000 Hydro polls were destroyed in Ontario; as well as 1,000 transformers and 300 steel towers for as long as 33 days in some rural areas. While, for some, the Ice Storm was a mere inconvenience, for others, it was a crisis.

“When I was first alerted to the emergency, my pager went off throughout the night; talking about powers lines going down,” recounted North Dundas Mayor Tony Fraser. “That was not an uncommon occurrence, sometimes winter just happens. So, I got out of bed and it was the eeriest, strangest thing; because it was warm for the season.”

Back in 1998, Fraser was working for

the Fire Department, so he was one of the first one's on the scene of the Ice Storm's beginnings. Fraser found the whole experience very “disconcerting,” not always knowing where to go and who to help; because everyone needed help. No one had electricity for food, bathing or even warmth.

Frank Herkeens, owner of Dundas Power Line, was in Cornwall negotiating a formation to create a super line-contracting company with six other linemen. However, while he and his team were supposed to be paying attention to their accountant, they couldn't help but notice that it was raining outside. “It was ice raining outside, and it's ice raining hard and we know the phones

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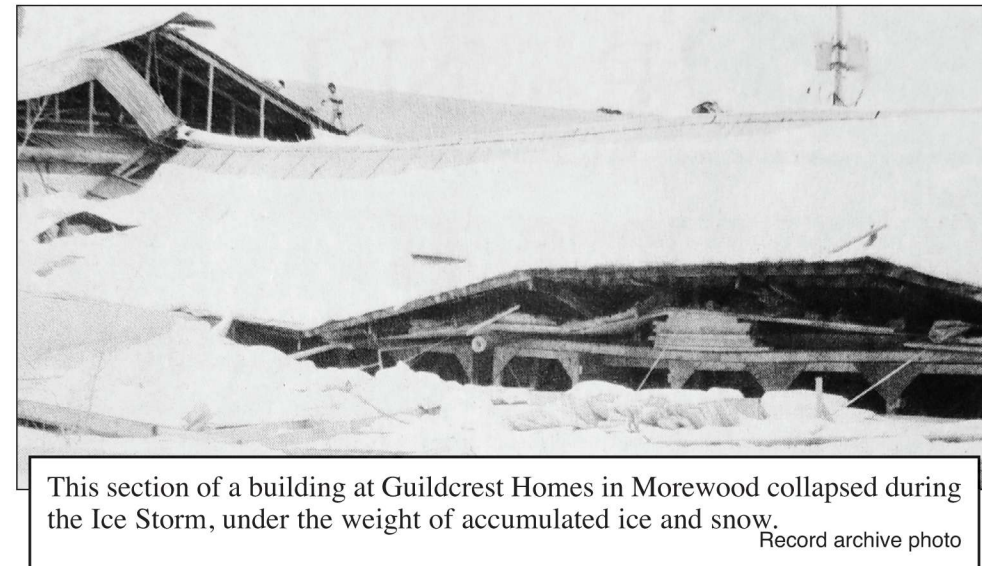
## Ice Storm

**Continued from page 16B** are about to ring,” he said. “And by 12 o'clock, sure enough, the phone started ringing, the meeting broke up and we all left and that was the last chance we had to put this super company together because there was so much damage that there was enough work for everybody for the next two years.” Herkeens estimated that approximately 7,000 poles went down across Eastern Ontario.

However, in complete hindsight, the Ice Storm became something that North Dundas needed to rally residents together after a rough amalgamation. Locals needed to meet their new neighbours and even depend on the kindness of strangers to survive.

JEDEXpress owner Ed Duncan and his son, MP for the Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry riding Eric Duncan, opened their home to more than 50 residents to allow them a place to stay warm. Ed saw that there was a long line of residents without power that needed help and needed it quickly, so he did not hesitate to provide a needed service. “There was a line coming in from Inkerman that ended just around the corner where the power went out,” said Ed. “I was out with the fire department, we were out helping people and they were pretty cold; so, I said, ‘Well, come up to our house.’”

Eric added, “That was the small-town aspect of it, we



This section of a building at Guildcrest Homes in Morewood collapsed during the Ice Storm, under the weight of accumulated ice and snow.  
Record archive photo

went door-to-door to make sure that they were okay.”

For Herkeens, while work was piling up and, upon seeing the devastation that was tolling up from all the freezing rain, the pressure really got under his skin. “I drove back to Russell and I met a Hydro lineman between Morewood and Russell and the devastation was unbelievable; tower lines were down, poles were down and lines were down,” he said. “We've all done storms, but we never seen devastation like this degree.”

The sight was so overwhelming for Herkeens that he had no choice but to quietly sit in his truck and just let his emotions flow through naturally. “I remember us just sitting north of the Marionville turnoff, both of us alongside of the road, just balling our eyes out,” he recounted. “Just crying like grown men, just for something so terrible happening. After our cry session, we got up, we hugged

each other and he said, ‘Let's get to work.’”

While Herkeens was hard at work restoring power back to the community, the Duncan family was on a mission to bring power back to those who needed it the most. People needed generators and they needed them quickly and the US was the closest place to grab as many as a truck could fit.

“I had a credit card with a big limit, I told them to go buy as many generators as you can buy,” said Ed. “It was about \$800 - \$900 for a decent size generator, so I called up the border to tell them that I was bringing up some generators for an emergency. They had an emergency meeting and they said to bring them up, show the bill and they'll let me in for free.”

Ed then sold each generator to anybody who was in desperate need of heating and plumbing in their house. Simply selling them from the back of his trailer, he made

sure to run the conversion fairly to ensure everything in the deal was fair. They ended up selling every single one of the generators that they

brought over. “It was kind of weird because when they were gone, they were gone,” said Ed. “I sold to people that I didn't even know.”

And that was what both Ed and Eric really took from the experience of the Ice Storm. The Ice Storm may have been a difficult time, but it was what the Township of North Dundas needed to bring the locals together in the wake of the difficult amalgamation that had everyone with their backs up. “People from all over were going to live in the Agricultural Hall [in South Mountain], different families from all over,” said Eric.

On a happy note to end on, Herkeens recalled one of the happier moments from his time during the Ice Storm in Chesterville. “Hydro informed

us that the power was at the end of our switch and I told the guy, ‘Don't turn it on.’ I went and sat up on the hill, the highpoint of the town and I told them to slam the switches,” he said. “It was just an awesome feeling to see all the lights come on at once. It was pitch black, it was cloudy all day and then they both slammed them on at the same time and the town lit right up.”

Herkeens said that restoring power to the town of Chesterville was like seeing Vegas, the faint sound of cheers could be heard in the distance.

While the Ice Storm is a disaster that will not be soon forgotten, the impact it left on the community of North Dundas remains in the heart of residents to this day.



Chesterville's Steve Irven, left, and Winchester's Matt Sumegi were part of a 20-person crew that cleaned up storm damage at Drumond's Sugarbush near Spencerville following the Ice Storm. The crew was hired on a six-month contract sponsored by New Beginnings for Youth. The program was one of seven in Eastern Ontario that was funded to the tune of \$2.7-million by the federal government.  
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