

Coffee with the Mayor

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Currently sitting in Portland, OR watching it rain. It is Portland after all. Had several cups of coffee with my daughter. This wasn't Stumptown coffee but coffee from a local coffee shop called Heart. It was good. I did have a cup of Stumptown coffee at the airport. Couldn't pass it up!

The original plan was to come to Portland to watch the oldest grandson play baseball (he's almost 5) but the game was rained out. Then we were heading to Denver for the birth of our third grandson, but, if you read earlier, that already happened two weeks ago. So we are still going to Denver but I'm heading home the next day and the wife is staying a few more days to help out the youngest daughter and her family.

There was considerable activity, to put it mildly, on the west side of town this last couple of weeks. The activity was due to several water leaks, one was fairly significant. Without going into a lot of detail, the city's Water and Street Departments deserve a big THANKYOU for their efforts in addressing these leaks. They worked almost 30 hours straight in working to plug them. The one on Price Road required additional pumps to get ahead of the water before any patching could be accomplished.

The Water Department dug up the area, located the leaks and were able to patch the hole and the Street Department made the road passable. Firemen on duty delivered sandwiches for dinner. Drinks and pizzas were provided earlier so the men could keep at the task. Even the neighbors offered chairs, drinks and a place to sit. The men worked as a team focused on the task, never complained and worked to support each other. Suggestion: take the opportunity to thank a city employee next time you see one for they make our utilities possible.

The leaks throughout the city happen all too often. One reason this happens is the age of the pipes, in some cases almost 100 years old. Another is the pipe material, which in some cases doesn't age well. The process for fixing a leak is fairly straight forward, but not always simple. Finding the source of the leak usually takes the longest time as the water on the surface doesn't mean the leak is directly below. It requires digging with a backhoe and the leak can often be several feet from the start of the dig. Once the location of the leak is discovered the water pressure must be reduced and the hole pumped to access the pipe. The nearest valves are located to try and isolate the leak and temporarily stop the flow of water. If these valves don't work, for whatever reason, other means are tried to reduce the pressure. Once the pressure is reduced and the water level is below the pipe the actual leak can be dealt with using a patch. Patching the actual leak usually takes the shortest time in this process.

Once the patch is securely in place the hole must be filled and, if under a roadway or street, filled and packed as much as possible up to the level of the pavement. This location is monitored continuously to ensure the fill material is even with the pavement and more added if needed.

I've directly observed the employees dealing with several of these leaks and can say, without a doubt, they are true professionals. They work together as a team and never complain although they do get frustrated! This is true of all the utility workers! To the workers I quote an old Navy saying, "Bravo Zulu", (based on the two signal flags B and Z) which means recognition of a job Well Done!

Next blog I promise to talk about waste water and provide an update on the Evan Witty project.