

East Nantmeal tops region in latest snowfall

by Kathy Boccella, [Inquirer Staff Writer](#), Posted: February 14, 2010



Usually, record-breaking events are fun. Just ask folks in East Providence, R.I., which made the longest strand of beads in the history of the planet last year, or Hillsboro, Ore., which shattered the mark for most people donning Groucho Marx glasses.

But people in East Nantmeal Township in northern Chester County would gladly give back the dubious distinction it gained last week: the community with the deepest snowfall in the storm that put the Philadelphia region over the top for its snowiest winter on record.

No matter how bad things were where you live, it was worse in East Nantmeal, which recorded 26.8 inches. Runner-up was neighboring South Coventry, with 26.1 inches. Philadelphians, by comparison, saw a measly 15.8 inches recorded at the airport, so they should really stop complaining.

No one is more aware of East Nantmeal's stupendous achievement than Jim Jenkins Jr., salesman, township supervisor, and road master - meaning the guy who has to drive the snowplow at 2 in the morning.

"It's not a very pleasant honor," Jenkins said with a laugh. "It was a lot of work, and we had a lot of unhappy residents who were nonetheless very nice as far as working with us."

The township has 1,785 residents, 875 homes, 24 miles of roads, and more buffalo (a small herd) than businesses (one). If you've never heard of East Nantmeal - or West Nantmeal, for that matter - you're not alone.

Jenkins couldn't think of one famous East Nantmealian or one thing the town could hang its hat on before last week.

"We try to stay under the radar," he said.

But the Great Snowfall brought more attention than the rural community had ever known. A television crew even trekked the 40 miles from Philadelphia to report on the accumulation.

How much snow was there? Gobs, spread like Cool Whip across a pie. The town looked like Montana without the mountains. And as in that state, digging out can take days. By Friday morning, eight to 10 homeowners were still trapped, though Jenkins said most residents had a Zen attitude toward snow.

"People in our area realize you just have to sit and wait," he said.

You can almost hear a faint *Om* from beneath the mounds.

With just two part-time road crews and four guys on call, East Nantmeal needed all the help it could get. So it called on the owner of its one business, electrical contractor John Philips, who has a mega-snowblower that tunneled through 1,300 tons of snow an hour.

"If we hadn't had him to open roads, we'd still be out there with backhoes," Jenkins said. "We have a lot of farms, so the wind blows the snow across the fields and onto the roads."

Philips, who said his family had lived in the area since 1754, started at 7 Wednesday morning and finished at 11 p.m. His bill to the township? Zero.

"We've been a here a long time, and we try to help whenever we can," said the good neighbor.

So how did the community find out it was top (snow) dog?

The National Weather Service uses volunteer spotters to measure snow throughout the region. In East Nantmeal, that position could belong only to Paul Callahan, a self-described "weather geek" who installed a weather station in the backyard of his stone-and-stucco home and runs his own weather Web site.

"I've never seen anything like it," he said, still in awe as he stood on his back deck looking at the tundra-like landscape, where 18.3 inches of snow was tallied after last weekend's blast and 15 inches on Dec. 19.

For Callahan, a pharmaceutical salesman, the snowstorm was more fun than usual because he had a week off between the end of his old job and the start of a new one. So he had all the time in the world to devote to his hobby.

He started measuring at midnight heading into Wednesday. Then 6 a.m. Noon. 6 p.m. He took his last reading at 8 a.m. Thursday, trudging through waist-deep drifts to get to his measuring board.

When he's not home, his patient wife, Carolyn, is in charge of the yardstick.

"It's an obsession," she said of her husband's hobby, as their children, ages 2 and 4, played nearby.

To which Callahan always responds, "I could have a lot worse hobbies."

A weather nut since he was a kid in Northeast Philadelphia, Callahan has an explanation, of course, for East Nantmeal's mega-snowfall.

The township is 700 feet above sea level, compared with 20 feet for Philadelphia. And it had no sleet.

"We normally get more snow anyway," Callahan said, "but this is unreal."

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