

# How Labor Is Reshaping Equipment Needs



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As I write this, the snow industry is entering yet another winter season. Weather predictions run the gamut. I get people calling and asking what I think will happen this winter, as if they believe I'm the great prognosticator of weather events to come. Sadly, that is not my forte and I'd be guessing, just like all others, if I made a prediction. So, I stay away from what the weather is going to be like.

I hear from many around this great country about the woes, problems and challenges facing snow contractors for the upcoming winter. One issue that is definitely a constant in all parts of the snow world, is labor. The economy is picking up. Whatever the government policies are, they are affecting the labor force. With the uptick in the economy, more folks are finding gainful employment. This good fortune for the economy is creating challenges within the snow and ice management industry that is something bothersome to all who fight the elements each winter.



I am happy about the economic conditions as I too am benefiting from the apparent successful rebound in the economy. I too have felt the effects of the past half-decade of stagnation we have all witnessed. I too have looked at what my underperforming IRA and 401K has suffered through these past several years, bemoaning the anemic economic times that brought this stagnation to the forefront of the minds of those of us who now see thoughts of retirement creeping into our conversations. And, I too have relished the fact that the steamrolling Dow Jones Industrial is raising the positive outlook looking toward the last quarter of my existence on this earth.

However, there is a downside to all this. I am hearing, almost daily, about the challenges that most every snow contractor is experiencing with regards to obtaining labor to clear sidewalks and even to operate equipment used in our service offering. Talk has turned to: "How can I mechanize clearing walks instead of relying on hand labor?" This is a philosophy I wholeheartedly

endorse. Companies that build equipment for sidewalk snow and ice management are adding manufacturing space, trying to keep up with demand and working to ship units as fast as they come off the line.

At Snowfighters Institute, we normally have the latest and greatest products sitting at our facility for attendees at our events to get their hands on, play with, drive and generally check out what is available. Not this year. Nothing. No Arctics, no Ventracs, no liquid-distribution equipment. It wasn't from a lack of trying, or from our sponsors not wanting to display their wares. It was because nothing was available to sit offline in Erie, Pennsylvania for 14 weeks. The demand for these products is incredibly high at the moment. Obviously, this is good for those building and selling such equipment. But, many a contractor is going to be disappointed when they go to place an order for multiple units at upward of \$45,000 each. There simply are not enough to go around.

Supply versus demand will likely provide opportunities for those who are developing new equipment to solve the labor shortage that will permeate the conversation in many snow contractors' offices this fall. I have witnessed this myself as I sit in on discussions about: "How are we going to entice or draw in sidewalk crew members this winter?" Upping the pay scale is not necessarily the answer. If labor is simply not available, or if no one is looking for work, any incentive will fall short in the quest for necessary labor.

I don't have the answer, but I am seeing/hearing the negative effects of the economic boom as it pertains to those of us who pay attention to the snow and ice management industry. The bottom line, from my viewpoint is – you're not alone. Other contractors and entire industries are fighting for workers. I understand this will not come as a surprise to many, but it is the new reality for what looks like a few more years, and that is something I feel comfortable predicting.