

Use due diligence: Monette

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The target clients for snow removal outfits are typically not the able-bodied, 30-year-old first-time home owners who can clear their own driveway with ease, Cormier explains, but a senior or person with physical disabilities that has mobility issues and needs some aid.

Debbie Trickey, executive director of the Gloucester Seniors Adults' Centre, says she has heard all the "trials and tribulations" of one east-end couple dealing with Tony's Snowplowing earlier this winter.

After one particularly vicious storm, "they were stuck at home until they could get someone else to dig them out," Trickey recounts, adding that both are in poor health and could not even attempt to shovel out their driveway themselves. "One of the greatest fears (for seniors in that situation) is that you become ill, and you can't get out."

Unfulfilled snow removal contracts have been a "fairly prevalent issue" this winter for the Eastern Ottawa Resource Centre as well, Cormier continues.

Some of the resource centre's clients are now in a situation where they paid for a contract in September, did not have it completed

and are now forced to pay out yet again to another operation, Cormier explains.

"It's money they didn't have in the first place," she says, continuing that with the fixed income of a pension and often higher medical costs, it can make for an even greater financial burden on seniors in particular.

Cormier advises seeking recommendations from neighbours or friends – a contractor who appears at the door or is found via a listing may not always be the most reliable. A dependable operation will also always be available in an emergency, she continues, and easily reachable at all times.

Residents should always check with the Better Business Bureau before signing a contract with a snow clearing outfit, adds Monette, to determine if any complaints have been filed, or if the organization has a history with the contractor or business.

He also suggests asking for area references and for the owner's name, as well as contacting a ward councillor to see if there have been any previous issues.

"It's like any contract," Monette says. "If someone comes to your door, are you just going to take their estimate and go with that person? There needs to be due diligence."