

Virginia technician saves the day when fire and flood threatens havoc



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Lumen Customer
Service

Technician Duane
Smith recently
had a day of
biblical
proportions. It
started with a
flood, followed by
a fire, all before
lunch.

“It was raining
like crazy,” said
Smith, a four-year
company veteran



based in Charlottesville, Virginia, as he remembers that November morning. On that soggy day, he drove his truck to the Lumen central office in north Charlottesville, entered the building, and quickly realized it was wetter inside than outdoors.

“A drainage pipe had gotten clogged up, and there was already three feet of water on the floor when I arrived,” said Smith, who tried to clear the drain with another technician without any success. “I grabbed a 20-gallon trash barrel and started scooping out the water as fast I could to try to get things under control.”

It took over an hour for the two men to clear out the water and protect the onsite “point of presence” (or PoP) that provides service to thousands of customers in the region. Cold, wet, and tired, Smith returned to his truck and was headed to the work center when he noticed a young woman, baby in her arms, on the side of the highway, waving for help.

“She had a small boy with her, also trying to flag me down. It only took me a few minutes to

realize what was the matter,” said Smith.

Roughly 100 feet from the young family, flames were poking through the hood of their Honda Pilot SUV. At that point, Smith began to operate on instinct.

“I pulled my truck into a nearby library parking lot to make sure I was a safe distance away. Gas tanks are usually in the mid-section or the back of the car. I thought I had a chance to do something before it got worse,” he said.

Smith grabbed the portable fire extinguisher in his truck, quickly approached the burning vehicle and sprayed foam around the front grill, putting out the fire. Moments later members of the local fire department arrived.

“The fire chief told me if I hadn’t acted when I did, the car would have been a total loss. The plastic front end of the SUV took most of the damage. It melted, but it can be replaced,” he said.

Turns out Smith is no stranger to fire extinguishers. His father was an executive at a company that manufactured them. He used to regularly take home sample units, so that he could show his son how to use them.

No one really had any idea about Smith’s morning exploits until he dropped off the empty extinguisher and asked one of his colleagues, Diane Farish, where he might be able to get a new one.

“Technicians don’t usually bring in empty fire extinguishers, so I was naturally curious,” she said. “Then he told me the reason why. I’m so impressed that he would stop and take action like that and not drive by. Makes you feel very proud about the members of your team.”

Smith downplays the whole thing.

“I’m not a hero or anything. I was just doing the right thing,” he said. “I just hope someone would do the same thing for me.”

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