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ALLSTON BRIGHTON

For some Bostonians, there's no escaping summer's oppressive heat

Posted by Matt Rocheleau July 21, 2011 12:37 PM

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(Matt Rocheleau for Boston.com)

On a ladder high above Commonwealth Avenue in Allston, a man did masonry work on a three-story brick building. A man who said he'd hired the hourly-paid worker to do the lofty outdoor project requested that the worker not be asked for an interview until after the day's job was done.

By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

When the weatherman says it's going to feel like 102 degrees and the city issues a heat advisory, for some weekday workers it means a day off with perhaps a journey to the beach or local pool. Others spend their workday traveling from one air-conditioned space to the next.

But for some there's little, if any, refuge.

PHOTOS

For some, there's no escaping the heat

Late morning Thursday as the mercury had already eclipsed the mid-80s and that insert-curse-word-here humidity made it feel around 10 degrees warmer, John Shaughnessy of South Boston was one of several NStar crew

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members on the site of a roof replacement job in Allston.

He had the luckier job of watching from the ground, making sure his two co-laborers on the roof of the electrical substation stayed safe. He made sure their work did not interfere with the mechanics inside the century-plus old facility near the intersection of Commonwealth and Harvard avenues.

As the temperatures continued their oppressive march upward, Shaughnessy, when asked if the crew might call it quits before their usual 3:30 p.m. clock-out time, pointed toward the roof workers and said, "that's up to them."

"Roofers have the toughest job in the world during the summertime," he continued. But, he said, they don't complain. "They're used to it."

Further west down Commonwealth Avenue, veteran street sweeper operator Nello was parked for a moment underneath the shade of an overhanging tree and fortunate to be riding in an air conditioned-equipped machine.

"It's comfortable. Not all machines have [AC], but this one does," he said from the driver's seat of the bright-yellow vehicle owned by Dorchester-based American Sweeping, a company the city contracts to sweep its roadways.

Without any climate control, he said "it gets hot, but usually not too bad."

Though indoors, a non-air-conditioned, ground-floor renovation site near Packard's Corner provided little escape from the heat.

"We won't have an early day today. Maybe tomorrow," said Richard Garvin of Quincy inside a former convenience store being converted into an Ecco Pizzeria. "It's supposed to be oppressive tomorrow."

Brighton resident Don Laffey has been a mail carrier for 26 years.

"The good days are few and far between ... during the spring and the fall. But, I don't mind it," he said, as he exited one apartment building lobby and headed for the next.

"The guys that are really hurting are the ones doing single family homes [which rarely offer indoor relief, unlike apartment routes] and climbing a lot of stairs," the 56-year-old said.

The worst part of his morning and early afternoon route is when he changes to the opposite side of Commonwealth Avenue where there's less shade and, thus, more direct sunlight.

"When you go to the other side of the street, it's like you're in a different atmosphere. It's 20 degrees hotter. The [not air-conditioned] hallways with the glass doors over there," he said pointing toward a row of apartment buildings lobbies across the street where he will later stand and spend several minutes sorting mail into each unit's bin. "It's like an incubator in there."

And, Laffey will be doing a single-family home route later in the afternoon – working overtime to cover the shift of another mail carrier who called out of work Thursday.

"I don't know why he's not in," he said. "It could be the heat."

Nonetheless, he said, "I put everything in perspective. My son's in out in

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Afghanistan right now. It's 120 degrees everyday over there."

He said his 20-year-old son Scott, an infantry Marine, is scheduled to return home in 19 days. When he talks to his son on the phone about the heat some 6,500 miles away from Boston, Scott tells him, "It's not too bad."

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