



Sneaux Down South: A Frozen Bayou

By *Kernesha Weatherly, DHA, MHA, CRA, CNMT, RT(CT)*
Ochsner Health System
kerensha.weatherly@ochsner.org

Along the Louisiana and Mississippi Gulf Coast, where the air usually hums with zydeco beats and the scent of gumbo, the world turned unrecognizably white. On January 21, 2025, over a foot of snow blanketed parts of the bayous, frosting palm trees and gator ponds alike. Streets familiar with rain, not ice, lay paralyzed, slick and silent under layers of a powdery substance. Mardi Gras beads hung icily from fences and branches, and crawfish pots sat unused as locals swapped gumboots for whatever snow gear they could muster. A region built to endure hurricanes now faced its rarest storm ever, adapting with ingenuity and grit amidst the shimmering, surreal landscape of snowdrifts.

As northern cities bundle up against the cold, we revel in warm fall nights, stifling humid air that invites laughter and music to spill onto the streets. Our streets don't go quiet under a blanket of snow; they stay alive with jazz riffs and streetcars rattling down St. Charles. New Orleans isn't a place of snow days or frozen lakes. It is the home of jazz, the heartbeat of a global music revolution. It's the birthplace of Mardi Gras Indians, whose traditions honor African and Native American heritage through intricate suits and soulful parades. It's the epicenter of Creole and Cajun cuisine, serving iconic dishes like gumbo, jambalaya, and po'boys, alongside the powdered sweetness of beignets. It's where moss-draped oaks sway gently in the breeze, and rain baptizes the streets in a soulful rhythm,

refreshing rather than burying. This city thrives in the warmth, where life is celebrated boldly, without the icy grip of winter silencing its pulse.

Hurricanes and tropical storms are deeply ingrained in the fabric of Gulf Coast. However, those storms, often brewing over weeks, come with extensive warning systems, allowing residents and local governments time to plan evacuations, stock supplies, and fortify infrastructures as best we can. Those storms typically unleash a combination of torrential rain, high winds, and storm surges, wreaking havoc on coastal areas and threatening lives and property.

In contrast, snowstorms are a rarity in the South. When they occur, they bring unique challenges. The Gulf Coast region's infrastructure, including roads, bridges, and homes, is not built to withstand freezing temperatures or heavy snow accumulation. Not to mention, the scarcity of equipment like salt spreaders and de-icing materials means even a light snowfall can cripple transportation and daily life. Our tractors carry floats, not snowplows.

Streets turned treacherous, homes lacked shovels, and everyday routines froze in place. Roads, slick with ice and untouched by salt, became impassable. Bridges across multiple parishes were closed off from each other, cutting off communities and families alike. The Interstate 10 corridor—a vital thoroughfare connecting the East to the West—shut

down over 200 miles for days. For the first time ever, Southern Louisiana was under a blizzard advisory. This snowstorm felt like a visitor from another world.

The Louisiana and Mississippi Gulf Coast has long been seasoned in the art of crisis response, weathering hurricanes, floods, and tropical storms with a blend of preparation and unshakable resolve. Communities here know how to mobilize in the face of chaos, leaning on each other to rebuild and recover. When the unprecedented snowstorm hit, it is no surprise that the same resilience shined through. Though snow and ice were unfamiliar foes, this region approached them with the same grit used to tackle hurricane winds and rising waters. From makeshift snow tools to creative problem solving, we proved once again that our strength lies in adaptability and unwavering determination.

Despite the winter weather, many of our dedicated team members stayed on site for days, ensuring our patients continued to receive the exceptional care they deserve. Social media lit up as locals shared tips and offered help to those stranded, proving that community spirit doesn't falter—even in an unfamiliar storm.

Our Radiology team did what they do best: they adapted. Technologists, schedulers, and radiologists pivoted with incredible efficiency. Patients were contacted, schedules were reshuffled, and staff found creative ways to keep

imaging services running. These efforts ensured continuity of care for patients who needed it most. The snow may have stopped Interstate 10, but it didn't stop our imaging equipment.

In true fashion, this snowstorm became a story of resilience, resourcefulness, and the strength of a community unshaken by the unexpected. It served as a stark reminder of our Imaging team's strength and adaptability, qualities that often go unnoticed but are integral to the broader healthcare landscape. Far too

often, Imaging Services operate as the silent backbone of patient care, providing critical diagnostics that guide treatment decisions, no matter the circumstance. When over 12 inches of snow paralyzed parts of our region, our radiology teams didn't miss a beat.

Our Radiology team's ability to adapt stems from their role as a bridge between patients and treatment. We thrive on precision, timeliness, and constant problem solving—qualities that shine brightest during moments of unpredictability.

In an industry that demands flexibility, radiology has proven time and again to be a model of resilience, stepping up in crises without fanfare or expectation of recognition.

This snowstorm underscored what those within the field already know: radiology is more than just images; it's a sector defined by resourcefulness and dedication, quietly leading the way when healthcare's foundation is tested.

As we reflect on this unprecedented snowstorm, I am filled with immense gratitude and pride for our organization and, in particular, our incredible radiology teams. In the face of a crisis unlike any we've prepared for, they displayed ingenuity, resilience, and an unwavering commitment to patient care.

To everyone who showed up, adjusted, and worked tirelessly in front of or behind the scenes to overcome these challenges: thank you. Your efforts are a reminder of what we can achieve together, even under the most difficult circumstances.

Let this moment inspire us all. If we can navigate a foot of snow in a city unprepared for winter, there's nothing we can't overcome. 🌨️

Kernesha Weatherly is an accomplished healthcare executive with extensive experience in radiology and imaging services. As the Vice President of Imaging Services, Kernesha leads strategic initiatives across multiple imaging modalities, overseeing operational efficiency, staff development, and process improvements.

She has demonstrated success in driving organizational change, including the creation of imaging access centers and the integration of new technologies and services, while maintaining a patient-centered approach. Kernesha is also deeply committed to leadership development, multi-disciplinary collaboration across service lines, and fostering a culture of collaboration within healthcare systems.

In addition to her leadership role, Kernesha is the founder and Managing Partner of Strategic Imaging Consultants, a consulting firm that helps healthcare organizations optimize their imaging operations through tailored strategies and process improvements.

She has been recognized for her work in imaging, including Radiology Business' "40 Under 40" award and has a proven track record of managing complex transitions, including mergers, staff engagement, and departmental growth.



Photos from New Orleans, Louisiana, January 21, 2025.