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Family loses everything but lives in fire

By Howard Mozel
OAKVILLE BEAVER STAFF

Call goes out to help mother & two daughters

While Friday night's fire at a Sarnford Place home has split up an Oakville family yet again, all its members are happy to be alive.

The blaze has forced Gina Connolly to live with her fiancée's sister while her children - Lyndsey, 8, and Alyssa, 12 - are staying with their grandmother in Burlington.

The family was renting the house but did not have insurance for the contents.

Total damage is estimated at \$60,000.

"It makes you sick," said Gina, a nurse with Para-Med, who is engaged to be married.

Her fiancée, James Dickinson, was living with the family and was the first to alert the other occupants to clear the house.

According to Dickinson, the fire started around 11:30 p.m. in an old fireplace insert in the basement of the house. He

said they were told by the former owners that the insert had been known to smoke on occasion, but that it was nothing to worry about.

"The Fire Marshal said it was a 23-year old accident waiting to happen," said Dickinson, who was on the couch when the carbon monoxide detector went off and the carpet by the fireplace started bubbling.

Dickinson said he yelled to Gina who

grabbed Lyndsey and together they fled out the front door. Dickinson and Alyssa headed out the back door. Alyssa told her mother that no sooner had she and Dickinson cleared the door than flames erupted.

"It was like a bomb going off," said Dickinson, who explained that the back door blew off.

Added Gina: "It's just too much to think about."

The flames were so intense the kitchen appliances upstairs melted. The top of fridge sank in on itself as did the countertop microwave.

"It's unbelievable," said Gina, who explained that everything in the basement was lost. This includes her children's TV, VCR and computer, plus some antiques.

The family managed to salvage some frozen food and pieces of smoke damaged clothing from the bedrooms which Gina had to re-wash several times.

(See 'Donations' page 5)

Trucker charged in teen's death

An Ajax truck driver has been charged in connection with an accident that killed a 19-year-old Oakville woman on the Queen Elizabeth Way Feb. 10th.

Karen Lewis was driving a Toyota Tercel east on the QEW when a collision occurred between her car and a tractor trailer. Her car then crashed into another tractor trailer parked on the shoulder of the eastbound lane.

Lewis was pronounced dead at the accident scene.

The two drivers of the trucks involved in the accident were not injured.

The driver of the first truck to collide with Lewis' car, Helio Feliciano, 31, has been charged with criminal negligence causing death.

Woman killed in head-on crash

An Oakville woman was killed and three others injured Friday after head-on collision on Hwy. 5 just west of Bronte Road.

Barbara Kinnaird, 55, of Levanna Lane, died when the Saturn she was driving was struck by a Jeep with three male occupants.

According to Halton Regional Police, the accident took place around 4 p.m. when the westbound Jeep crossed into the eastbound lanes and struck the Saturn.

Kinnaird, the only occupant of her car, was pronounced dead at the scene.

Those in the Jeep were extricated by the Oakville Fire Department and transported to area hospitals. Their injuries were not life threatening.

The highway was closed to traffic until about 9 p.m. to allow investigators to reconstruct the collision.

Police are asking any witnesses to the crash to contact Constable Rick Ferguson of the Public Safety Unit at 825-4747 ext. 5056.

Man loses law suit over cost of tutor in teacher dispute

By Kim Arnott
SPECIAL TO THE BEAVER

A Burlington father's bid to hold the Halton Catholic District School Board and its high school teachers responsible for the costs of tutoring his son through last fall's labour dispute has been dismissed by a judge.

Bill Petey, who has a son in Grade 12 at Notre Dame, had filed a lawsuit in small claims court demanding \$1,040 from the board and the teachers' union.

In his claim, Petey said the lack of after-school help for his son Ryan forced the family to pay outside tutors for additional help in math.

Teachers with the Catholic board refused to offer after-class assistance with homework, or participate in any other voluntary activity, during the work-to-rule campaign conducted through the first five months of the school year.

(See 'Suit' page 2)



Photo by Barrie Erskine

Knox Presbyterian church Elder Shirley Humble and her son T.J. rang the bell in their church tower at 1 p.m. on Mon. March 1st to celebrate the Landmine Ban Treaty becoming international law.

Ringling church bells herald land mine treaty

By Wilma Blokhuis
OAKVILLE BEAVER STAFF

The bells were ringing at Knox and St. John's churches, as Oakville joined 45 communities across Canada to ring in Canada's Landmine Ban Treaty as international law.

The celebration included ringing the bells at Parliament Hill.

The Ottawa Convention On The Prohibition Of The Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personal Mines and On Their Destruction became international law at 1 p.m., Eastern Standard Time, on Monday.

St. John's United Church organized a bell ringing at its carillon, which was attended by 13 people. The church also invited neighbour-

ing Knox Presbyterian to join in, where nine-year-old T. J. Humble was found swinging on the rope in the bell tower.

"We were approached by Jean MacRae of St. John's to participate," said elder Shirley Humble, T. J.'s mother. "We wanted to do our part and decided to do something very special to celebrate the passing of this wonderful legislation into law." She asked her son, a Grade 4 student at Chisholm School, to help her with the bell ringing.

MacRae, who received the information about the bell ringing only last Thursday, spent all day Friday circulating copies of the invitation to different churches. "We were trying to get as much participation as we could for this international event."

(See 'Celebration' page 5)

Battle lines being drawn in fight for public schools

By Kim Arnott
SPECIAL TO THE BEAVER

It's north versus south in the battle for Oakville public schools.

South of the QEW, where the population of school-age children is declining, public schools have twice as many desks as local students.

North of the highway, the population is exploding and the few local schools that do exist are crammed to capacity, with many children bused elsewhere daily.

To make matters more difficult, new provincial funding rules mean the public school board can't get money to build new schools in the north if schools in the south have extra space.

While neighborhoods in the south have long been vocal participants in the board process that will try to find some resolution to the problem, on Monday night residents from north Oakville weighed in with their perspective.

"I think, if you look at the numbers, you'll see that the rational decision is to build a school in River Oaks," Jeff Mehtretter told public school board trustees. "Unfortunately, for a school to be built, another school has to be closed."

While recognizing that the decision to close well-established neighbourhood schools is both difficult and politically unpopular for trustees, residents of the River Oaks community urged the school board to consider the greatest good for the greatest number of students.

"We appreciate that there are no easy answers," said Christine Woodhead. "It always seems easier not to take something away than to give something new to someone."

The delegations were speaking to the school board's accommodation management committee, which is considering a staff report that recommends closing three elementary schools and building four new ones.

The schools suggested for closure are Oakwood, in Oakville, and Fairfield and Champlain in Burlington.

New schools are recommended for River Oaks and West Oak Trails in north Oakville, Headon Forest/Walker's Heights in Burlington and south Georgetown.

Bill Parker, father of two pre-school children, argued that the numbers demand the board address north Oakville's need for schools.

In 1996, he said, the population of River Oaks was 12,645. The town of Oakville forecast estimates the area's population will climb to 15,600 by 2001.

The area has one of the highest percentages of children under four years old, and the Halton District School Board itself has forecast that North

Oakville's current elementary school capacity of 4,600 pupils will have to accommodate more than 6,000 students within five years.

"Where will our children attend school?" he asked. "Our community has been identified by the board as in priority need of a public elementary school for 10 years. We cannot wait any longer."

Another local resident urged trustees not to be swayed by the current use of southern school facilities for daycare and seniors activities.

"Although important social issues, (they) are not and must not be a factor with the Board in making this important decision," said Cynthia Radich.

"Although located within our schools, these are not the responsibility of the board or the public school taxpayers," she added.

While several delegations made reference to an apparent decision by the town of Oakville to refuse to approve school site plans which include portables, Ward 1 councillor Ralph Robinson says no such decision has ever been made.

"The town has never officially taken the stand of no portables," said Robinson, who sits on Oakville's site plan committee.

"I individually always vote against them though, and I have for 15 years," he added.

School board trustees also heard from residents of the West Oak Trails area, urging the board to keep its school site on Fourth Line, rather than looking at a site on Third Line and West Oak Trails Boulevard.

The group argued that the Fourth Line site is larger, located in a less heavily trafficked area and located in a more convenient spot for the majority of area residents.

School closure meeting to be held at Oakwood

The Halton District School Board's accommodation management committee has set an additional date for a public meeting being set for Oakville.

A meeting will be held on March 11th at Oakwood Public School at 7 p.m. and a maximum of 12 public delegations will be heard.

Another general accommodation meeting will be held on March 9th at 7:30 at the board office at 2050 Guelph Line, just north of Upper Middle Road.

The accommodation management committee will decide on its final recommendations to the board on March 23rd, while the board will look at the issue on April 7th.

Delegations can register by calling the board office at 335-3663.

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