

Christmas Eve fire destroys Colborne home

COLBORNE
CHRONICLE

JAN. 2/03 BY MANDY MARTIN
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Fire completely destroyed the Colborne home Tom Klinaftakis and his six children Christmas Eve. But Christmas came to the family through an outpouring of community support.

Shortly before 7 p.m. Christmas Eve, Brenda and John Dhaene were sitting down for a celebratory dinner at Brenda's parents just up the road from 17 Percy Street. Looking out the window, they saw flames licking the night sky. The two-storey Klinaftakis home was engulfed in fire.

Tom Klinaftakis and his six children, aged from one to 13 years, were not at home when the blaze began. They were in Oshawa.

Meanwhile, motorists travelling the main traffic artery into Colborne from Highway 401 had alerted the Cramahe Fire Department. Both Brighton and Cramahe Fire Departments fought the blaze for 3.5 hours before it was brought under control at 11:30 p.m. Volunteer fire fighters remained on the scene until 2 a.m. Christmas morning to ensure the blaze did not reignite.

"Thank heaven there wasn't a wind," Don Prentice says. "It would have spread the blaze to neighbouring houses."

Even while the blaze was being fought, the community was rallying to ensure the family's safety, security - and Christmas Day gifts.

"Even as the fire was burning, people were arriving at our house dropping off presents already wrapped. Children, hearing about the fire, were taking their own presents from under Christmas trees to give to the Klinaftakis kids," John Dhaene says. "Can you imagine that?"

As it was, the brick residence at 15 Percy Street has charred windows on the north side facing the charred shell at 17 Percy Street. At 19 Percy Street, the south wall siding has been burned.

"The heat was overwhelming," Mr. Dhaene recalls. The Dhaene's live directly across Percy Street from the Klinaftakis home.

The family's pets - two dogs, a bird and a goldfish - all perished in the fire.

"Claude (Belanger) and I went in to try and get the two dogs out," neighbour John Dhaene. "I was able to get one dog down the stairs and then the smoke overwhelmed me. Claude brought the one dog the rest of the way out, but it was already dead."

A second dog buried itself under clothing in a downstairs room and would not leave the premises.

Word of fire spread quickly through the village and environs.

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PHOTO BY CLAUDE BELANGER

ABOVE, CHRISTMAS EVE BLAZE: Brighton and Cramahe Fire Department's battled a blaze which destroyed a two-storey wooden home at 17 Percy Street, Colborne on Christmas Eve.

COMMUNITY STEPS IN TO SAVE A FAMILY'S CHRISTMAS



PHOTO BY MANDY MARTIN

\$1,100 COLLECTED: Monday morning, Tom Klinaftakis, centre, father of six and owner of the home destroyed Christmas Eve, was presented with \$1,100 collected at Mr. Convenience in Colborne. Terry Lee, business owner, , and employee Kelli Griffis, right, counted the donations store patrons have contributed since the Christmas Eve fire in Colborne.

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"It was just 10 minutes before the start of our Christmas Eve service (at 8:30 p.m.)," John Rutherford of the Old St. Andrew's Presbyterian congregation says. "We received word from Don Prentice. We announced the fire and asked for donations. Do you know, over