

Neighbor recalls Christmas blaze

'It was all red. I was scared'



The twelfth chicken was found hiding away under the boards in the shed last Friday by Rosano Gregoris. Mr. Gregoris is a neighbor of Marjorie McKerr of Sideroad 5, near Highway 25. Miss McKerr's home burned down early Christmas morning and she is currently staying with friends. Mr. Gregoris has moved her feathered flock down to his coop to take care of them.

(Herald photo)



Marjorie McKerr tries on a new pair of boots with the help of family friend Joan Fretz of Town Line. The 70 year old woman lost everything in the Christmas morning fire that destroyed her home on Sideroad 5.

(Herald photo)

The weather was contributing factor

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The weather was a contributing factor to the Christmas morning blaze in Halton Hills, said Halton Hills Fire Department Chief Bill Cunningham.

Halton Hills firefighters called region employees into the area to sand and salt the approximately 800 foot driveway to the residence to aid the equipment travelling the route.

After being subjected to severe heat and crashing through to the basement the unit is now being sent to the CSA or ULC laboratories for further examination, the spokesman said.

Chief Cunningham said Halton Hills firefighter, Jack Vos, 26, from area 1 (Acton) is improving in condition after suffering four breaks to the lower left leg.

The firefighter had been buried up to his head in debris after a wall collapsed and tumbled outwards.

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Boarder helped with house chores

Lina Dal Bello said her family had been asleep when a knock came to their door, and a neighbor up Sideroad 5 said there was a fire.

"We called the police and the police culled the fire people," Mrs. Dal Bello said. "There was nothing we could do because it was too late."

A resident of Sideroad 5 for three years, she said she really didn't know Marjorie McKerr, the old lady who lived next door. Mrs. Dal Bello said she would see Miss McKerr in the summertime when they'd be outside.

She said she knew Charlie Ferrier, the man who boarded in the home.

"When he cut the grass he'd say hi. He was a nice guy. Friendly, yeah, very friendly," Mrs. Dal Bello said. "He did everything for her because she was old. I didn't know the other boarders, not even what they looked like."

By ANI PEDERIAN
Herald Staff

The Gregoris family on Sideroad 5 near Highway 25 was sleeping when the phone rang at 1 a.m. Christmas Day.

Joseph Dal Bello was on the other end, talking about a fire.

When Rosano Gregoris took a look out his back window, he understood better what it was Mr. Dal Bello, his neighbor, was trying to tell him at that early hour.

The heritage home between the two neighbors was the scene of a terrific fire.

"It was all red. Boy, I was scared, oh yeah," Mr. Gregoris told The Herald. "The wind was blowing ashes over my place and ashes on the

other side of the road too."

Although Mr. Gregoris feared one of the ashes might start a fire in the home he's lived in for the past 18 years, that didn't happen.

The owner of the home and the 48 acres around it, Marjorie McKerr, escaped. The blaze that destroyed the home she'd lived in since she was 10 years old.

She escaped with just her nightie -- no shoes, no coat, nothing.

Two other residents of the home, William Veerman, 30, of Acton's Fourth Line and Charlie Ferrier, 60, were not as lucky. Their bodies were found upstairs in their bedrooms by firefighters

tackling the blaze.

Miss McKerr's bedroom was downstairs.

Mr. Ferrier had retired last year because of heart trouble, Mr. Gregoris said. He had worked at Milton's Ernest C. Drury School for the Deaf as a janitor and security guard.

He had never married, Mr. Gregoris said. Mr. Ferrier was described as a little man, not very tall.

"Bill, I don't know much about him. He left in the mornings at 6:30 a.m.," Mr. Gregoris said.

He said the younger man's Volkswagen had been driven away by his brother that day, Friday. A second red car was

still on the property.

Near it, by the dark beige blocks that made the outer frame of the burnt tool shed was Mr. Ferrier's Plymouth Colt.

Not much remains of the home, but charred wood, metal twisted and strewn on the ground, no roof, and a couple of oil furnaces on their sides.

"Maybe the wind blew down the chimney," Mr. Gregoris said, trying to explain the cause of the fire which took down the house.

He said Mr. Ferrier smoked, but doubted the fire was caused by a forgotten cigarette.

bed early," Mr. Gregoris said.

Taking a tour around the remains of the house, Mr. Gregoris pointed out the charred structure of a lawn tractor in the shed adjoining the house.

He walked several yards away to a wooden shack on the opposite side of the driveway. The chickens were kept here and although he'd already caught 11 of them and taken them to his coop in his back yard, his wife had sent him back to find the twelfth.

There it was, hiding out. In a short time, Mr. Gregoris had caught the last brown chicken and tied its legs together for the trip to the Gregoris coop.

Survivor tells her story

By ANI PEDERIAN
Herald Staff

When Marjorie McKerr stepped out of her Sideroad 5 home Christmas morning, she was black from head to toe.

The 70 year old woman escaped her burning home just in the nick of time, unlike two men who died in their beds upstairs.

"We were all fast asleep. What woke me up, I'll never know," Miss McKerr told The Herald. "I got up, grabbed the flashlight at my bedside and got out the front."

Thanks to a young man leaving neighbor Monique Beaulieu's party, help met the tall slender woman.

"I don't know who it was, he broke the glass on the side of the front door and said to me 'You can't stay here'. So he took me out on the lawn and set me down, with no shoes on or anything else."

Miss McKerr got out with only her night clothes. Everything else, from antique furniture to old photos to a lifetime of articles perished in the blaze.

The young man who gave Miss McKerr the helping hand had spotted the fire on his way out and had come back to the Christmas Eve party to tell Mrs. Beaulieu her barn was on fire.

When Mrs. Beaulieu looked out back to see, she immediately phoned the fire department, having recognized "the barn" as Miss McKerr's home.

The young man drove Miss McKerr to Milton District Hospital where she was treated for

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Motoski hits car

A 14 year old Limehouse youth on a motoski hit a car on Sixth Line when his motoski crossed the road, Christmas Eve.

Stanley Whitehead ended up spending Christmas in local hospitals.

The youth fractured his right ankle in the collision and was taken to Georgetown Memorial Hospital by a parent. Dec. 26 he was transferred to Peet Memorial Hospital where an orthopedic surgeon was able to get a look at his ankle.

The youth was allowed to go home Friday. Stanley was southbound on the northbound portion of Sixth Line, Halton regional police said when he collided with a 1976 Pontiac driven by a Limehouse resident.

Damages totalled \$1,650. Stanley is a student at Limehouse Public school.

Forces car to ditch

A Normandy Boulevard man was charged by Halton regional police after he struck a 1983 Chrysler, forced it into the ditch, then left the scene of the accident.

The man was charged with failing to remain, driving while under suspension and operating a vehicle without insurance.

The incident took place on Ninth Line and there were two people in the Chrysler. They were unhurt, police said.

Damage was \$2,000 to the Chrysler and \$1,000 to the car of the charged man.

The man had his girlfriend in the car with him. Court date is Jan. 28.

Driver falls asleep

An early morning drive at 2:30 a.m. Dec. 23 proved to be dangerous for a 23 year old Georgetown woman.

The driver fell asleep at the wheel and ended up crossing Trafalgar Road and going into a ditch. A Halton Hills Hydro pole was struck on the way.

Albert Evans, 29, a passenger in the car, suffered minimal injuries and was taken to Georgetown Memorial Hospital by ambulance.

There was \$4,500 damage to the 1975 Oldsmobile and \$4,000 damage to the hydro pole and hardware.

The woman was charged with careless driving.

Christmas Eve robbery

Approximately \$1,200 cash was stolen Christmas Eve from the Acton Arena on Knox Avenue.

Thieves entered the arena through the emergency exit doors on the west, Halton regional police said.

There was a second break-in at the arena the next day, and the vending machines were attacked.

Donut shop damaged

There was \$350 worth of damage to the front door of the donut shop at the Pioneer Gas Bar on Acton's Queen Street Christmas Eve.

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