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A METROLAND COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER VOL. 144 NO. 99 TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2004 \$1.00 (GST included) 40 PAGES "Using Communication to Build Better Communities"

Support pours in for family after house fire



Photo by JILL KITCHENER

From left, volunteers Carolyn Anstey, Samantha Attew, Ethan Hesse and Holly Attew look over the donations to the Martin family at Chris Hadfield Public School.

By **JASON MISNER**
The Champion

Six-year-old Holly Attew, her long dark hair set against her pink top, is anxious to show what she's giving her best friend, Jasmyne Martin, 6, as a gift.

Holly's handing over an extra photograph of their senior kindergarten class at Chris Hadfield Public School to Jasmyne, whose copy was lost in a Wednesday night house fire. The 8 p.m. blaze destroyed the Martins' new home on Somerville Terrace, near Fourth Line.

"I cried a lot," Holly said after hearing about the fire.

Fortunately Jasmyne and her 10-year-old sister, Shaneikah, nine-year-old sister, Tenisha, six-month-old brother, Pierson and mom, Loukisha, 29, escaped the burning home — but with only the clothes on their backs. No one was seriously injured.

About 60 Milton firefighters worked vigorously to douse the stubborn flames, but couldn't save the \$400,000 house. The cause of the fire is still under investigation.

Everything was reduced to ashes. Clothes. Furniture. Mementos. The van, in the garage at the time of the fire, became a hollowed, blackened shell.

But the loss of belongings is where the community has stepped in — and in a big way.

After learning of the devastating fire Thursday morning, staff at E.W. Foster Public School, where Shaneikah and Tenisha are enrolled in French immersion, and staff from Chris Hadfield sent letters home with students that day pleading with parents to donate warm winter clothing and money to help the Martins.

Friday morning school officials were floored by the response. Clothing and all kinds of other items, enough to fill three vans, were gathered and collected.

Ms Martin, who's staying with her mom in Mississauga while the family pieces their lives together, was amazed at the community's generosity following the few carloads that arrived at her mom's place Friday afternoon.

"I'm in disbelief," the early special needs teaching assistant said yesterday. "It's one

of those things you can't put into words. I'm just so thankful. I'm just so — wow!"

Jasmyne celebrated her birthday recently and her gifts were burned in the fire.

Ms Martin, who has insurance, said she'll be donating excess material to charity organizations.

"It's been a huge outpouring of kindness," said grateful E.W. Foster principal Dave Swanson. "The community has stepped up to bat. The family is brave to go through an ordeal like that."

The items at E.W. Foster were taken to Chris Hadfield later Friday morning for sorting to be taken to Mississauga.

Holly's mom, Samantha Attew, and other parents gave up their time to help sort the pile of gifts and supplies that turned the staff room at Chris Hadfield into a department store. The floor was barely visible.

They neatly folded jeans, snow suits, sweaters, shirts, socks, underwear, PJs — the list was endless — into piles for the kids. Toys, stuffed animals, lip gloss, Kleenex, books, shoes and backpacks stuffed with school supplies accompanied the clothes.

"I felt very upset because how would I feel if it was me," said Ms Attew, as she separated clothes and toys.

Heartfelt cards were sent with the gifts.

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Police escort officer attacked while transporting prisoner

A police escort suffered a broken nose and head injuries after being punched repeatedly while escorting a 17-year-old male at Milton court Friday.

Just after 1 p.m., an uncuffed youth — whose name can't be released — was being moved from one courtroom to another when the Halton Regional Police escort was attacked.

The escort officer was repeatedly pummeled in the face and body during the attack until fellow escort officers and police officers intervened to restrain the attacker.

"It was an unprovoked attack," said Det. Sgt. Don Cousens.

The escort officer — whose name isn't being released until his family is notified — was taken to Milton District Hospital and held

over the weekend for observation. He was released yesterday.

A youth was to be formally charged in connection with the assault at press time yesterday.

Halton Regional Police is asking anyone with information concerning the incident to call police at (905) 825-4777 or Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-TIPS.

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