

Woman found dead in house full of garbage

'The only way to clean that place is through a controlled burn or to bulldoze it into the ground.'

BY KATHLEEN GRIFFIN
Staff Writer

An 88-year-old Markham woman found dead Monday had been living in complete squalor, with garbage piled 'floor to ceiling' in every room of her home, police say.

York Regional Police are having trouble locating Marion Dent's next-of-kin and want to talk to anyone who may have known her.

Emergency crews had to break in after responding to a call of Mrs. Dent's collapse, seen by her late husband's niece through a window of the home at 10855 Kennedy Road, just north of Elgin Mills. When the door gave way, the stench from inside was overwhelming. At least one police officer was sick.

"Her husband died 10 years ago and from all accounts she had become extremely eccentric," said Det. Keith Freemantle.

"She would chase away anyone approaching the house, even the niece, who stopped in and left groceries for her on a regular basis."

Neighbours told police the woman wouldn't speak to them, though they saw her outside occa-



STAFF PHOTO/KATHLEEN GRIFFIN

A photo taken through one of the ground-floor windows shows some of the garbage-filled squalor Marion Dent lived in prior to her death. The house is on Kennedy Road near the Whitchurch-Stouffville border.

sionally. When they approached her she ran them off or hid inside.

"It seems she was stockpiling garbage for the last 10 years," Det. Freemantle said.

"It was floor to ceiling in every room, with little narrow pathways through it so she could get around. You could smell it 200 feet away."

Mrs. Dent also had five cats.

Animal Control staff are still trying to locate them.

Pop cans and boxes, cat food tins, paper, plastic jugs and other refuse reaching the roof can be seen

through the window of the old farmhouse.

Garbage has spilled outside, mostly pop tins and cat food cans.

The niece, who was unavailable for comment Friday, lives in Toronto. She became concerned after she was unable to reach Mrs. Dent and called police after looking through a window and seeing the senior lying immobile on her back.

An autopsy revealed she died of a heart attack.

"It's very sad," Det. Freemantle said. "The niece said she became extremely upset if anyone tried to go inside and she was never let in."

A space heater was found lying across her legs and had badly burned her lower legs and feet, but it was not connected with her death, Det. Freemantle said.

"We don't have her maiden name, or any information about her at all."

She had paid her taxes in 2001 and still had a small amount owing for 2002, but the Town of Markham doesn't have next-of-kin either," he said. "We don't even know if she had a will or anything like that."

A rickety barn near collapse on the property was also filled with garbage, he added.

"The only way to clean that place is through a controlled burn or to bulldoze it into the ground," Det. Freemantle said. "I can't imagine the vermin and bugs in there."

Anyone with information should call Det. Freemantle at 905-881-1221, ext. 7541.

RESIDENTS ADAPT...BEFORE AND AFTER THE ARRIVAL OF SPRING



STAFF PHOTOS/BILL ROBERTS

Before this week's big winter-ending thaw, Markham and Whitchurch-Stouffville residents managed to have fun in the snow. Karl Sider (above) spent several weekends constructing a seven-foot-high igloo for 10-year-old daughter, Bethany, at their Markham home. It could hold 12 people and had electricity for heat, light and a radio. Armin and Patricia Boensch (right) enjoy a patio coffee during mild weather on Main Street, Unionville.



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