

**PUBLIC SAFETY:** Drug lab charges

# OFF-DUTY FIREFIGHTER TO RESCUE

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An off-duty Markham firefighter has been released from hospital after assisting with the evacuation of one person during Monday afternoon's house fire on Merdock Court.

The off-duty firefighter was driving along Main Street when he saw thick black smoke coming from a residential area in the south end of Stouffville.

When he arrived, an elderly woman was on the front porch, her husband was inside. The off-duty firefighter went inside and eventually found the man near the front door and assisted him outside.

"Had they not been assisted, it was possible that they may have perished," said Const. Rebecca Boyd of the York Regional Police.

The fire broke out around 1 p.m. in the basement of the home. By the time fire crews closed, flames had punched out the glass surrounding the closed front door.

"We went defensive," said Rocco Volpe, Whitchurch-Stouffville's deputy fire chief. "We (couldn't) go inside and get a direct hit on it. It was just too way ahead of us."

*The fire was caused by a drug lab that turned marijuana into cannabis resin'...*

It took about three hours and 25 firefighters to douse the blaze.

Once firefighters were able to get inside the home, they discovered several small butane cylinders, said Rob McKenzie, Whitchurch-Stouffville's fire chief.

The fire was caused by a drug lab that turned marijuana into cannabis resin, commonly known as hash oil, in the basement, according to York Regional Police. The police service's drug and vice unit and the Ontario Fire Marshall's office continue to investigate.

"He was certainly producing something there was an illegal market for," Const. Boyd said.

Mark Edward French, 29, described as the home's basement occupant by York Regional Police, has been charged with production of a controlled substance, possession of a controlled substance and breach of probation. He remains in custody until his court appearance in Newmarket tomorrow.

He was arrested without incident, but was not in the home at the time, according to Const. Boyd.

The house sustained about \$450,000 worth of damage, according to York Regional Police.

"There's four walls and a roof still there. But the inside damage is fairly extensive," Mr. McKenzie said.



PHOTOS/ROMAN SYDOR

Whitchurch-Stouffville firefighters battle a house fire on Merdock Court, near Oscar Peterson Public School, Monday afternoon.



Firefighters work the back of the house, visible from Hoover Park Drive in south-end Stouffville.

## Get to know neighbours, mayor tells residents

During Tuesday night's council meeting, Mayor Wayne Emmerson called Monday afternoon's \$450,000 fire a shame.

A nice home will now sit vacant for six months while the investigation takes place and insurance is sorted out, he said.

Police say a drug lab operating in the basement of the home sparked the fire. A 29-year-old Stouffville man faces charges.

### NEAR ELEMENTARY, HIGH SCHOOLS

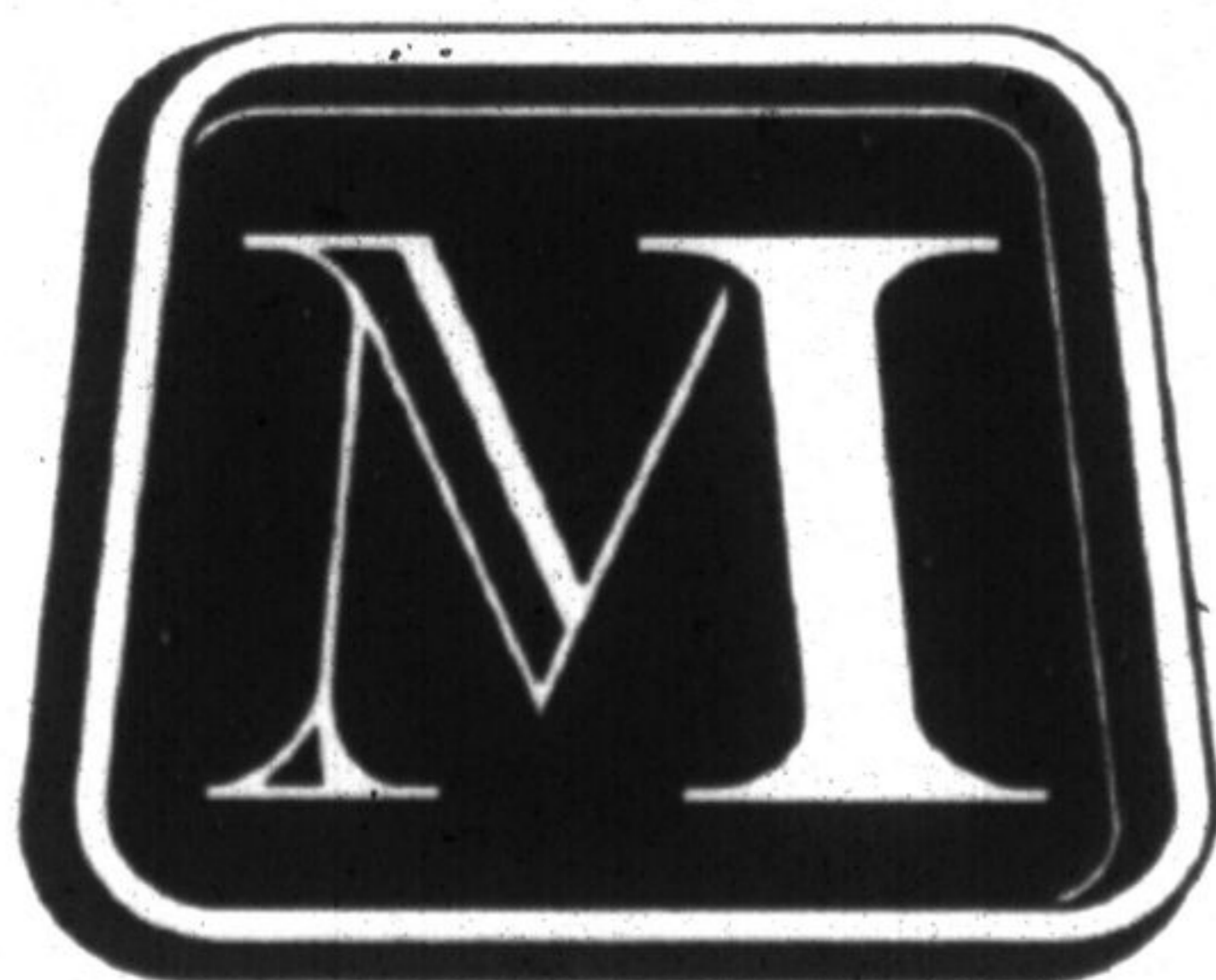
Mr. Emmerson also said police had been watching this particular house "for a while".

"Whether there was an investigation going on before, I can't confirm," said Const. Rebecca Boyd of York Regional Police.

Mr. Emmerson also noted we should get to know our neighbours better.

"This is right in amongst a subdivision. We should know who our neighbours are. It's likely been going on for a while," he said.

The home is on Merdock Court, near Hoover Park and Sandiford drives. Oscar Peterson Public and Stouffville District Secondary schools are in the neighbourhood.



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