

Firefighter aided in 2007 rescue

From page 1.



PHOTO/ROMAN SYDOR

Off-duty firefighter Gord Hooper saw smoke from a house fire in Stouffville Monday and beat fire crews there. He helped rescue two people.

search," he said.

Mr. Hooper was unable to locate the man or get downstairs because when he touched the door leading to the basement, it burned his hands.

While heading back to the front door, Mr. Hooper came upon the husband and helped him out of the home.

"I didn't really find him," he said.

Mr. Hooper handed the couple over to some of the numerous bystanders who had gathered on the street, who provided shelter and care until EMS arrived.

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

With the two people being cared for, Mr. Hooper grabbed a snow shovel and broke the basement windows in search of the potential second person.

"The basement was non-survivable. The basement was just roaring," he said.

Mr. Hooper doesn't know how much time elapsed from when he got to the scene and when Whitchurch-Stouffville Fire and Emergency Services arrived, but he knows it wasn't long.

'The basement was non-survivable. (It) was just roaring.'

It took about 25 firefighters three hours to douse the blaze, according to Whitchurch-Stouffville Fire and Emergency Services.

The blaze, which caused about \$450,000 worth of damage, was caused by a drug lab in the basement being used to turn marijuana into cannabis resin, or hash oil, according to York Regional Police.

"The speed that the fire developed made me suspicious at this time," Mr. Hooper 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.

Along with sustaining superficial burns to his hands, Mr. Hooper suffered from smoke inhalation, which he was treated for at Markham Stouffville Hospital.

This is not the first time Mr. Hooper has jumped into action while off duty.

In 2007, Mr. Hooper was one of the first people to come upon a single-vehicle accident in which a man's car plunged down an embankment, flew through the air and landed on its roof in a farmer's pond north of Clarendon.

Mr. Hooper, along with another firefighter, helped organize the rescue effort, which included a number of people forming a human chain and using their feet to sweep the water for the body.

The driver was found outside the vehicle in about five feet of water. Mr. Hooper pulled the man's body to shore, where he and another firefighter tried to resuscitate him to no avail.

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