

Fire halts area communications

By Sarah Sobanski

A 32-year-old Tudor man has been charged with setting a fire that knocked out communications across the Bancroft area. Centre Hastings OPP reports officers were called to a home on Cleveland Road in Tudor Township for a break and enter around 11:30 p.m. April 28. The homeowner said he had found a man stealing shoes and money, but when confronted the suspect fled on foot.

Later called to a fire in an abandoned house in Bannockburn, the OPP found the same man. He'd started the fire.

The fire melted nearby internet and telephone lines halting most communications in Bancroft and surrounding area, sources say. Tudor and Cashel, Limerick, Wollaston, Faraday, Bancroft, and Hastings Highlands were affected. Services were down from the time of the fire until around 9 p.m.

Some landlines calling within their own exchange were working, such as some 332 numbers, as were select service cellphones.

Otherwise area businesses were cash only and WiFi free. There were no outgoing or incoming calls.

Emergency services were also affected, though 911 calls still came in. North Hastings Fire Service and its partner departments dispatched from station to station. Fire chief Pat Hoover says the fire service lost communications with Belleville dispatch and had to man local fire stations as points of contact.

Luckily, Bancroft OPP Const. Philippe Regamey tells *Bancroft This Week* the fire service and Bancroft OPP have a radio to communicate with each other should regular technology infrastructure cause a problem. He notes they also have satellite radios and protocols for losing communications in their Continuity of Operations Plan.

“This means that we have items in place, such as another building to run out of, a gas station that if closed will supply us with fuel and other agreements with partners and agencies,” he said.

“We utilized one of our vehicles as a repeater for our radios and had access with our onboard computers where there was cellular service. This was north and west of the Bancroft area where the service wasn't affected.”

Regamey said the OPP responded to 13 calls for service while communications were down. He said some “called 911 to see why cellphones were not working, or asked if they could be connected with Bell. Another individual dialed 911 who was trying to call 411 because nothing else was working.”

The 32-year-old was charged with break and enter, arson and failing to comply with probation. He was held for bail April 30 at Belleville court.