

## Fire razes R&L Bus Lines in Bancroft



By Nate Smelle

On the morning of Saturday, March 28 the Bancroft and Hastings Highlands Fire Service received a call that R&L Bus Lines yard on Monk Street in Bancroft went up in flames. Fire crews from the surrounding area converged at the scene before 9 a.m. after receiving the call. The building was basically gutted by the flames however staff and volunteers from the community were still able to save some of the important files from the offices. Luckily no one was injured in the blaze.

A testament to the efficiency of R&L Bus Lines the school buses were back up and running on their normal schedule only a couple of days later. Owner/operators Wendy and Laurie Evans are personally devastated by the fire, however, they still feel lucky in many ways, Wendy said.

?When we first got there we were able to get inside to get a few things, but then the OPP said it was too dangerous and we had to get out,? she said.

?We were lucky to get back in to get a few more important things after fire chief Pat Hoover went inside and assessed the fire. The amount of support we have had since is just incredible. Saturday with all of the people who helped us bring things out. We really couldn't have picked a better community to live in. I spoke with somebody from the city on Saturday who told me if this happened to him there would not have been such support from his neighbours.?

The Town of Bancroft has also donated a couple of truck bays to allow R&L to repair their vehicles. All of the staff at R&L are still working in spite of the massive disruption to the regular routine.

The Evans' are extremely grateful to their staff, the fire crews and everyone who has come forward to lend a hand so quickly.

?Everything is a write-off but as a company we will get through this,? said Laurie.

?It's really all we can do. You can't just stop doing business when something like this happens. Even during the fire on Saturday we were planning how to keep our buses and staff working by Monday.?

The Evans family is now left to pick up the pieces as they recover from the devastation. Evans' family friend Lynn van der Woude. has been working since the fire to organize a community fundraiser to help her friends in their time of need. The event will consist of a family skate from 1 p.m. until 2 p.m. There will also be pulled pork sandwiches available by donation, as well as a bake sale. The community has been very supportive in helping to put the fundraising event together so quickly, said van der Woude..

?Everyone has been so amazing... stepping forward to help in any way they can,? she said.

?The North Hastings Community Centre was happy to donate the ice-time for our event. No Frills has also chipped in cases of water and pop; the Hoover Family is going to supply the buns for the sandwiches, and Perry Kelly and Greg Maxwell will be running the barbecue.?

With their shop space and offices rendered useless the Evans has been operating their business from a temporary location next door until the demolition and restoration is complete.

?They are such a kind family and they have helped our community so many times,? said van der Woude.

?Now it is our turn to give back to them.?

For more information on the family skating event on Monday, April 6 and how to help; or to make a donation contact Lynn van der Woude at 613-332-8576.