

Fundraiser planned for fire victims



Fire department tape surrounds the place where two Coe Hill homes burned to the ground on Apr. 2, leaving two families homeless and without any possessions. JIM EADIE Special to This Week

By Tony Pearson

A week after the fire that devastated their lives, the victims are experiencing different moods. Jeanaann Barnaby remembers the shock when her partner came running into their house as she slept, calling to waken her. She remembers looking out her bedroom window to see the garage between her neighbour's house and hers on fire. She can recall the mad scramble to save their animals ? dogs, cats and pigs; not only to get them out of the house, but away from the propane tank, in case it exploded (thankfully, it didn't). The whole process was blazingly quick. Within 15 minutes of their getting out of the house, it was in flames. The blaze took her preserved memories ? her photos, mementos, and even the ashes of her passed loved ones. In the end, the dogs and the pot-bellied pigs were saved. So, it appears, were the cats, although as is their nature, they took it on the lam, and although one has been spotted, they haven't yet returned.

?What is there to say?? she asked. ?One minute your past is there, and then it's gone.? She expected that it would take a while to recover.

Gary Hicks, who with Mary Burbidge lived in the other house consumed by the fire, is at this point mostly stoical about the loss. He could only save some photos and one musical instrument. ?I'm learning to simplify my life,? he reported.

Barnaby felt that it was important that the fire department be prepared for sudden blazes. ?There were problems with the pumper, and the water supply ran out very quickly,?she stated.

?Preparations for the next fire should be completed before it happens. We don't want anyone to die in such an accident.?

Our reporter Jim Eadie spoke to the Wollaston fire chief afterwards. The chief told him that the fire was already out of hand when they arrived with their equipment. The firefighters basically conducted a defensive operation. They moved vehicles, got hydro unhooked, moved propane tanks, and prevented the fire from spreading any further

In any event, both Barnaby and Hicks stated that they were overwhelmed by the outpouring of community support. This support will again be demonstrated by a potluck dinner on Saturday, April 23, at the Coe Hill Community Centre, starting at 5 p.m. Local musicians will provide live music. There will also be a 50/50 draw and a silent auction. The price of admission is a donation to the fund established for the families, plus a contribution to the potluck.

Pat Bird, who is organizing the event, says that the motivation is evident. ?The victims are long-standing members of the community,? she noted. ?Mr. Hicks taught both my daughter and my granddaughter.? Her grand-daughter, Kendra Post, spoke of Mr. Hicks as ?a really nice man ? someone you could talk to whenever you had to.?

?Moreover,? added Bird, ?an event like this shows how we are all vulnerable; it could happen to anyone. It only takes a few minutes

to wipe out so many memories. That's why we rely on each other. We're a community; we help each other out. That's why we live here.?

Those who would like to volunteer, or who would like to donate an item to the silent auction, are invited to call Pat Bird at 613-337-5116.