

Local

Fire destroys Valley Ave. home

• FIREFIGHTER INJURES KNEE, TODDLER FOUND WANDERING NEAR FIRE SITE

BY KERRY McQUISTEN
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Monday just after noon, the Baker Fire Department responded to reports of a house fire at 1710 Valley Avenue in Baker City.

Early on, flames were visible from blocks away and smoke filled the streets, causing traffic to circle.

All the residents of the home were out of the building when the fire engulfed the home, according to Baker City Fire Chief Mark John.

“A total of 18 personnel responded to the fire— 13 from Baker City and 5 from Baker Rural,” John said.

According to County records online, the three-story home was owned by Kathleen Mitchell and was originally built in 1904.

Mitchell, age 85, resided in the historic home with her husband Carroll, her grandson Shawn Beavers and his wife Morgan, as well as their infant daughter.

Within moments of arriving, according to a witness on the scene, firefighter Dan Curtis took a fall, injuring his knee.

While not personally confirming Curtis’ name due to HIPAA privacy laws, Chief John did say the injury sustained on the scene resulted in a trip to the hospital to treat that injury.

Not long after, as heard on scanner traffic around



Wendee Morrissey / The Baker County Press

Firefighters fought Monday afternoon to save a fully engulfed home at 1710 Valley Avenue in Baker City.

1 p.m., responders on the scene went into “defensive operations”—retreating from the home due to the intensity of the flames and smoke.

By this time, smoke from the fire could be smelled in the air as far as south Baker.

To further complicate the matter, as suppression efforts wound down, a toddler was noticed wandering around the fire site by one of the firefighters just before 5 p.m.

Baker City Police responded and took the child to the police department.

About 20 minutes later, according to Police Chief Wyn Lohner, the child’s babysitter was reported by a firefighter as being on the scene looking for him.

As of the time of print, the case was being sent to District Attorney Matt Shirtcliff for review and consideration of criminal



Wendee Morrissey / The Baker County Press

18 total personnel responded to the fire.

charges.

Disaster action team volunteers with the American Red Cross also responded to the this multi-family fire, which they stated in a press release, affected four adults, a child, and multiple pets.

Red Cross provided food, clothing, comfort kits, stuffed animals and information about recovery services.

Those who resided at the residence reportedly lost all their belongings, and the home was completely destroyed.

At the time of print, the cause of the fire had not been concretely determined and was still under investigation, but the preliminary determination, according to John, was that the fire started due an electrical malfunction.

Grenade carried to Sheriff's Department

BY KERRY McQUISTEN
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Sunday evening around 7:10 p.m., Heather Matheny of Baker City came to the Baker County Sheriff’s office to report a grenade for disposal.

The grenade had been discovered while Matheny, 27, was cleaning the home of Merrill Carter, who had passed away last August.

Matheny said the device was being held by Mr. Carter’s son, who was waiting outside the building.

According to Sheriff Travis Ash, from his department Deputy Eric Colton responded. Sergeant Mike Regan from the Baker City Police Department also responded. It was quickly determined that the grenade was live, with the pin intact.

The Oregon State Police bomb squad out of Hermiston was called, and arrived just after 11 p.m.

The Hazardous Device Technicians in the bomb squad are qualified to conduct “render safe” operations of improvised explosive devices (bombs), booby traps, and military ordnance, as well as destruction of unwanted or deteriorated explosives, blasting caps, explosive chemicals, fireworks, and any other explosive items such as railroad torpedoes and specialty items. The technicians are also trained in post-blast investigation and weapons of mass destruction response.

While the technicians were en route, the grenade was moved once—away from the main building with inmate and staff safety in mind.

After the bomb squad arrived, the grenade was taken and rendered safe, with no injuries sustained at any time.

Baker City Police Chief Wyn Lohner said some “dead cord” was also collected from the home and disposed of.

Sheriff Ash asks that if anyone should come upon an explosive such as blasting caps, grenades, or any other suspicious device, to please leave the item in place. He encourages citizens to not use a cell phone near any suspicious device, and do not attempt to move it.

Durkee fire burns 175 acres



Photo Courtesy of Paula Sawyer.

The Trail Creek fire near Durkee spread quickly, burning 175 acres.

A wildfire in Durkee, dubbed the Trail Creek Fire, quickly burned to 175 acres last Wednesday.

After initially spreading fast, Jason Yencopal with Baker County Emergency Management, was on scene and said the fire was hit hard with a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) helicopter and at least four BLM trucks—in addition to a dozer from the rural fire protection department cutting a trail. A fixed wing plane also dropped retardant.

The fire was “laying down nicely” according to Yencopal, and containment was complete by that afternoon. No structures were in danger.

At the same time the Trail Creek Fire was burning, a lightning strike touched of another small fire just over the hill in the Dixie Creek area. The plane, which had been on site in Durkee, dropped some retardant on that small blaze on its way. One BLM truck arrived to monitor that fire, which was 100% contained.

Transient sales bother residents

A group of unlicensed transient merchants were reported going door-to-door in just about every neighborhood in Baker City this past weekend.

The company for which they allegedly work is unknown, and it is also unknown if the magazines and other items they claim to sell actually exist, or if all sales made are simply scams.

The transients claim to sell “charm and whit” when they first approach. Others claim to be minors who are trying to “win” a trip—they state various locations around the world—if they get enough sales.

Residents who see them in their neighborhood are encouraged to call dispatch so that a police officer can be called to the residence and handle the situation.

Haines girl wins for patriotic art

BY GINA K. SWARTZ
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Anthony Lakes Veterans of Foreign Wars post #3048, Ladies Auxiliary sponsors the Young American Creative Art Awards every year.

This year they have announced Ila Farber, a Baker High School Senior from Haines, Oregon, went on to place second in the state competition earning her a \$500 scholarship.

Last Thursday, July 9 at the local VFW hall, Farber was awarded a check in a small ceremony and her artwork was displayed.

The art contest is for students in grades 9 through 12 and the student need not be a direct descendant of a veteran. The requirements for the original artwork are that the piece be on either paper or canvas, no smaller than 8” X 10” or larger than 18” X 24”.

The art could be done in water color, pencil, pastel, charcoal, tempera, crayon, acrylic, pen and ink or oil. Digital art is not accepted. Entries were judged on originality of concept, presentation, and patriotism expressed; the content of how it relates to patriotism and clarity of ideas; the design technique; total impact of work; and uniqueness.

An essay must accompany the art work.

First place winners at Post Level go to the State competition, and the State winner goes on to the



Gina K. Swartz / The Baker County Press

L-R: Diane Florence, Jodi Thomas and Ila Farber.

National contest where the top eight winners are featured in the VFW Ladies Auxiliary Magazine.

All top eight receive scholarship money. Diane Florence, Auxiliary treasurer said, “Jodi is instrumental at getting in touch with the art teachers and getting the word out for students to enter. We judge the entries here at the post level and then the winner of that goes to the state level. So, Ila won at the local level and now has won second place at the state level. The entries come from all over the state so second place is a pretty big deal. The first place state winner goes on to national.”

Farber was the first entry from Baker City that has

ever gotten that far.

Jodi Thomas, Auxiliary Vice President and Chairwoman of the Creative Art Awards contest said, “It’s very impressive when you see what the children actually have done and then they write about their picture and some of it is very emotional. There are still good kids in our world.”

Thomas, who has been in charge of the contest for the last five years said this was the first entry she has had that has ever won anything. “And for anyone that is interested Crossroads will be displaying Ila’s artwork,” she added.

The artwork is Farber’s to do with as she pleases and exactly when it will be at Crossroads is up to her, when she delivers the piece

to them.

Thomas is hoping that by getting Crossroads involved it will spark more interest in the contest.

“When you only have one entry it’s a runaway (on the local level),” Thomas said.

Farber, who will be attending BYU Idaho in the fall said, “My art teacher, Mrs. Anderson, told me about it so I decided I might as well try painting.”

Mike Farber, Ila’s grandfather, who traveled from California, was beaming with pride as his granddaughter—one of eight siblings, he said—was awarded the scholarship money.

Mike Farber is a veteran and Ila’s older brother is a Marine.