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Thompson Creek blaze still under investigation

By Darcy Wallace
IVN Staff Writer

Fire officials are still investigating the exact cause of a blaze that severely damaged the McKenzie family's home on Thompson Creek Road Wednesday, March 30.

Illinois Valley Fire Prevention Officer Kamron Ismaili said 12 Illinois Valley firefighters and two from Rural

Metro arrived at the scene Wednesday afternoon. He said the blaze is believed to have originated near the kitchen on the second floor.

According to property owner Kristin McKenzie, her son only discovered the blaze after arriving home and opened the door to the kitchen when smoke billowed out towards him.

"He came up the driveway, unlocked the door

to the kitchen and was just bombarded with smoke," McKenzie said. "My mom has an adjoining house and [my son] ran to her house to get help."

No one was believed to be home when the blaze began and there were no reported injuries at the time of the incident, though McKenzie said she later took her son to the doctor because he developed a cough from the smoke.

McKenzie said the family lost several possessions and the house itself was in bad shape, but that they are temporarily living in a motor home and travel trailer while fire officials and insurance employees continue the investigation.

"A lot of people from the insurance company and the state fire marshal are out, trying to determine what the cause was," McKenzie said. "Basically how they're putting

it is that it's electrical — but exactly what electrical is the question."

The blaze left the upstairs of the home, the main living quarters, mostly destroyed, but McKenzie said the house and items within it, in the long run, are always replaceable.

"Thank goodness everybody is safe," McKenzie said.

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(Photo by Dale Sandberg, IVFD Media Dept)

The Illinois Valley Fire District mixed water with sunshine to create a rainbow during the fire on Thompson Creek Rd. Saturday, April 2.

Vandals sack West Fork

By Darcy Wallace
IVN Staff Writer

Sue Williams says she started work to improve West Fork Park near Kerby in 2006, enlisting the help of countless volunteers and a Recreational Trails Program (RTP) grant.

On Tuesday, March 30, Williams visited the park to find the map kiosk overturned and damaged, boulders moved, a handicapped parking sign missing and benches and tables gone.

"Anything [in the past] was small compared to this," Williams said. "Why would a few people want to do this kind of damage?"

Williams estimated at least \$1,500 in damages and is setting up a reward account at a local bank in Cave Junction. She said people have already pledged \$250 so far.

"Right now we're just trying to see if we can salvage the kiosk that was dumped over and broken," Williams said.

Williams called the Josephine County Sheriff's Office and an official visited the campsite and took photos. So far, Williams said the sheriff's office hasn't found any leads.

As a horseback rider herself, Williams said she felt the West Fork Park could use additional trails for hikers and equestrians. In 2007, she said she worked with the Illinois Valley Community Development Organization (IVCDO) and local park ranger Andre Briggs to apply for a Recreational Trails Program (RTP) grant.

After the grant was approved, funding came through in 2009 and Williams helped build trails with the help of volunteers, work crews, the Grants Pass Job Council and a corrections crew for some heavy lifting.

"We have just another half-mile trail to complete and two more picnic areas out by the west fork of the Illinois River," Williams said.

The park includes a variety of dogwood trees, mushrooms and

wildflowers along the trails. According to Williams, the trails are moderate in difficulty due to the sometimes-steep terrain, but she says it's worth it.

"[There are] incredible Madrone trees up along the ridge that just take your breath away," Williams said.

Patrols reportedly drove through the area last week before damage occurred, so Williams believes vandalism happened at some point over the weekend of March 26.

"They had to have a big truck since the benches weigh 82 pounds, and the tables about 75," Williams said.

The reward is offered in the hopes that if people took the missing equipment, they will return it. Items can be returned with no questions asked if they are returned soon, Williams said.

"I'm posting flyers around town [and] I'll have big reward posters at various places at the trailhead," Williams added. "We're hoping [the rewards account] will loosen some lips."

On Tuesday, April 5, Williams said a group was going back to the park to remove the damaged kiosk to salvage the least damaged pieces, and replace the kiosk when there are enough funds.

Williams said Biggs, the local park ranger, and her trail master Carol Crawford have been a big help in her work with the park. She planned to give them her own plaques to recognize them on Tuesday.

"I want to thank them because they've bent over backwards to make these things come true," Williams said.

Bingo event raises funds for veterans, students

By Darcy Wallace
IVN Staff Writer

More than 70 guests packed into the Cave Junction County Building this past weekend for the Second Annual Ham Bingo fund-raiser hosted by Glenn Morrison American Legion Post 70.

The Saturday, April 2, event featured a grand prize of a full meal with spiral ham and several gift certificates to local businesses. Along with bingo, guests had the chance to win in a 50/50 drawing, 25-cent hand cards and a silent auction.

Laurel Warden, one of the event organizers, said Sherry Overstreet won the final bingo round in a blackout game with the full meal deal of spiral ham and "all of the trimmings."

"I thought everybody enjoyed themselves," Warden said. "I think people were impressed with the spiral hams this year and we had a lot of nice gift certificates."

In the second year of the annual fund-raiser, Warden believed the turnout was strong, though the economy may have

impacted ticket sales for the 50/50 drawing. But playing bingo, and especially the prospect of winning, is a strong draw for many residents.

"Seeing the excitement of people when they win is my favorite part," Warden said.

Proceeds from Ham Bingo go towards various programs to support local veterans and for scholarships for students. One of the scholarships, Warden said, is for a weeklong event in Salem or Eugene where students work in a mock government simulations, giving them a taste of how local and state government works.

"[Students] get to meet congressmen, senators or the governor," Warden said. "It's really beneficial for them to learn. Some of them go on to take political science...and it gets them interested in government."

The Cave Junction American Legion and Auxiliary post also aims to support veteran programs and help individual vets and their families.

"We just enjoy being able to help our veterans and do community service," Warden said.



(Photo by Darcy Wallace, Illinois Valley News)

The kiosk at West Fork Park near Kerby was damaged last week after the park was believed to be vandalized.