

Fire rips through old Fred Meyer mountain cabin



by Douglas Gantenbein
staff writer

A little bad luck and a balky fire hydrant were contributing factors Sunday as a fire raced through Portland Youth for Christ's Son Village, a boys retreat at Wemme, formerly owned by Portland retail giant Fred Meyer.

No injuries were suffered in the blaze but the rustic old cabin was virtually destroyed.

The blaze began at around 3 p.m. when a grease fire broke out in a kitchen frying pan.

Hoodland Volunteer Fire Department units responded to the blaze and after a half hour appeared to have it extinguished. "We thought everything was alright," said Hoodland Chief Bob Fry. The Hoodland units then cleared and returned to their station.

But apparently, some sparks had lodged inside a broken ceiling light fixture and escaped notice when firemen checked the attic and a false ceiling.

A short time later, houseparent Craig Bazzi said he heard a crackling sound in the kitchen and upon inspection found "some burning in the ceiling, probably in the attic area."

Bazzi again telephoned the Hoodland Fire Department,

this second call coming in at 3:54.

By the time the firemen had returned, the fire had broken through the ceiling and much of the house was aflame.

Unable to control the blaze the Hoodland firemen, at 5:14, called in a pumper from the Sandy Fire Department. Soon afterwards, a Sandy tanker was called in as well.

Fry later said that both the tanker and the pumper should've been called at the same time but due to a communications breakdown they weren't. Fry himself was not at the fire at the time—his remote pager had not gone off and it was a neighbor who first informed him of the flare-up.

Worse, at this time it was discovered that the nearest fire hydrant, at Hoodland Park Plaza, was inoperable so water had to be trucked in from Welches Grade School.

The hydrant was owned and maintained by the Salmon River Water Co., Fry said later. However, many fire departments make regular checks of all the hydrants in their area to insure their operability.

The fire was not controlled until after 8 p.m. At the height of the blaze five vehicles and more than a dozen men were battling the blaze.

Fry later said that the lack of water hurt the firefighter's efforts. "When you have to haul in water there's just no way to bring in enough water to stop it (the fire), he said. "If you have an unlimited supply of water—then you can do something."

Ironically, that "unlimited supply," in the shape of the Son Village swimming pool, had been sitting just yards away until late in September, when it was drained.

"If the pool had been full we would've had all the water we could've used," said Fry.

Fry added that even with sufficient water it would have



THE CHARRED REMAINS of Youth for Christ's son Village home in Wemme.

been a tough fire to extinguish. "I've never seen a blaze quite as stubborn," he said. "There were so many little cubbyholes (for the fire to get into)—and no firetraps."

"Today they wouldn't be allowed to build a house like

this," Fry said of the old wooden structure.

Although there were seven smoke detectors in the building, none of them went off before the fire was discovered. There were no detectors in the kitchen area.

The cabin, overlooking the Salmon river, was originally built by Fred Meyer as a mountain cabin. Meyer sold the cabin to a private corporation, which then sold it to Youth for Christ.

Over the years, several

additions were built to the rustic old structure.

At the time of the fire four people were in the cabin: houseparent Bazzi and his wife, Gail, their child and one of the 15-year-old boys then in residence at the cabin.

The remainder of the 12 boys were on a field trip to Timberline Lodge and returned with counselor Ken Wilson at around 6 p.m. to find their home in flames.

The old cabin was the only one of the three Son Village structures damaged in the fire and plans were being made to lodge the youths in one of the other structures.

Dick Smith of Youth for Christ said that no plans had yet been made regarding the future of the severely damaged building. A damage estimate had not yet been made.



MAINTENANCE SUPERVISOR Larry Gusinger of the Son Village assesses the damage.

Weatherproofing topic of series

"Home Weatherization" is the title of a series of Wednesday night programs to be offered by Clackamas Community College beginning Oct. 12.

Home insulation, weatherproofing and moisture control and equipment maintenance will be covered by the classes being offered by the college in

cooperation with the Oregon Department of Energy and Portland General Electric.

Pre-registration is required for the free program. Information about the series is available from the college's Community Service office, 656-2631, extension 232.

Classes will be held at 7 p.m. in the college's Community Center Building, room 117.

USDA offers booklet

An agency of the USDA, the Economic Research Service (ERS), has prepared a booklet to help farmers and other business managers make the

best investment decision at the right time.

Those interested may have a single copy of the bulletin, "The Evaluation of Investment Opportunities: Tools for Decisionmaking in Farming and Business," AH 349, by writing to ERS Publications, Room 0954-S, USDA, Washington, D.C. 20250.

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Straub appoints Sulzbach

W. Pete Sulzbach of Sandy has been named to participate in the one-year project "Speak Out, Oregon."

Gov. Bob Straub last week announced the participants in three councils which will provide what he called a testing ground for improving ways for citizens and government officials to exchange views on public policy.

Sulzbach is chairman of the Sandy Community Action Center Board of Directors.

Straub last week received a telegram from President Jimmy Carter praising Oregon for taking the lead on more open government. He urged other parts of the country to follow the experiment and to take inspiration from it.

The three citizens councils appointed by the governor are in Portland, Eugene and Bend. Council members will discuss foreign policy issues. Straub said each council draws from surrounding communities and reflects a wide diversity of interests.

Broad public participation will be invited through a series of public television "feedback" shows and mail ballots.