

Rampaging auto invades house

Joe Banzer, 20, drove his Mazda RX7 into a house on First and Bridge Streets early New Year's day. Banzer's car sustained minimal damage, according to the police report. The house which was up on blocks and beams undergoing repair, was pushed down the hill behind it at least 20 feet and split in half. "It's the damndest thing I ever saw," one observer commented.

Apparently, Banzer, a local resident, was driving up First Street on a foggy night after celebrating the new year. He crossed Bridge Street and smashed directly into the old house, knocking it off its blocks and down the hill, where it split due to impact.

According to the Vernonia police department, Banzer, son of former county commissioner Joe Banzer, came in the next day and reported the accident. The

department commented that there had been an unsuccessful attempt to remove the car.

The house belongs to Cecil Huff and is one of the original mill houses built here. Huff, stated that he wasn't surprised, considering the circumstances, although it was an unusual event. "It was an awful foggy night," he said. "And New Years on top of that. Add a little whiskey and anything can happen," he added.

Huff isn't sure what he will do next. "It looks like a piece of junk, now," he said. "I haven't had time to really look it over. I think I'll salvage the house and build a new one."

Because Banzer reported the accident himself, there will be no criminal charges against him. Cecil Huff is expecting Banzer to help pay for the damages. "The boy has insurance," he said. "Someone's going to help pay for it," he added.



DO DROP IN — The impact created by Joe Banzer's car as it crashed into this house moved the structure 20 feet and split the building in two. FREEDOMFOTO

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DEQ bows to protest, lifts permanent backyard burning ban

The Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) has imposed a permanent ban on backyard burning effective Dec. 31, 1980. The ban was also placed on Multnomah, Clackamas, and Washington counties. The four counties are part of the Metropolitan Service District (MSD), an area that has experienced air pollution problems, particularly in the tri-county area surrounding Portland.

The ban was suggested by a citizen's committee studying the air pollution problem, according to Tom Bispham, of the Northwest Regional branch of DEQ. "The first problem the committee looked at was backyard burning," he said. "The DEQ commission imposed a backyard burning restriction in June of 1979, then granted an extension to Dec. 31," he

continued. "The purpose was to set boundaries for the ban, because there isn't a problem in some areas, especially Columbia County," he added.

In a hearing held Dec. 15, the decision to impose the backyard burning ban was made. Bispham felt that the commission did not have enough information. "The question of boundaries was overlooked in the hearing. We didn't have our study concerning the areas completed and the commission didn't get to it. We tried to bring it up at the hearing, but things just didn't mesh," he said. "It was an oversight," he added.

In a conference call to county fire districts and between commissioners on Jan. 2, the commission granted a 180 day extension in Columbia County for backyard burning. During that six month period Bispham and his staff plan to work to find alternatives to the burning ban and establish new boundaries for the imposition of the ban. "There isn't a problem with burning or pollution in Columbia County," he said. "The ban was not meant for Columbia County. It was aimed mainly at the Portland metropolitan area where an air pollution problem does exist," he added.

Response to the ban in the county has been quick. A spokesperson for the Vernonia Fire Department said that the county fire departments were hoping to gain an extension immediately, then get the ban removed permanently. Cindy Deakin, Vernonia resident, expressed a great deal of concern over the matter, saying, "I don't know what we'll do if we can't burn."

A member of the DEQ Northwest Region staff commented, "If you could hear all the people screaming and yelling in my ear, 'Why can't we burn?' you'd know why they lifted the ban."

New city council holds first meeting

The first meeting of the newly elected city council saw Mayor Henry Anderegg, council president Marge Dunay, and members Mike Fetherston and Wally Vaughn assuming their seats on the council with veteran member Ron Adams.

Adams promptly resigned, on the grounds that he had moved from town, and felt that he was no longer legitimately a citizen of Vernonia. "It isn't right for me to be here anymore," he said.

Sally Harrison, an employee at the Washington Grade School cafeteria, was appointed to fill Adams' place.

Mayor Anderegg appointed and confirmed chair and committee heads, committee members, department heads, and city employees, with a stern warning to the latter group that they would be in "strict contact" with the employees, to be sure they were "not wasting the taxpayers' money," he said.

A proposal was made by the police department for walkie-talkie radios. In case of emergency, officers have no contact with central dispatch when away from their patrol cars. The department has asked for two walkie-talkies and a base station. To facilitate acquisition and payment for the radios, the officers and

A build-up of creosote and soot caused a chimney fire in the home of Don and Barbara Bergerson of Timber route on Jan. 2.

According to a fire department spokesperson, the build-up created a plug in the lower part of the chimney.

He also pointed out that the age of the chimney had contributed to the problem. "We'll just put it out," he said. "We can't clean it, it's too rickety. The best we can

do is advise them to get their chimney cleaned out and rebuilt," he added.

The Bergersons have resided in their home for 24 years. Don Bergerson was born there, making the house, in Barbara's estimation, at least 48 years old. "I knew not to put water on it," she said. "That would crack the bricks. The chimney's not sturdy, anyway," she added.

Bergerson was alerted to the fire by the

smell of smoke. "I kept smelling smoke and I said to my son, Ted, 'do you smell something?' I went around and checked on things," she continued. "Ted went upstairs to his room and said, 'you'd better come up here.' I went upstairs and saw smoke pouring through the cracks in the chimney," she said.

"I know what you take first," said Bergerson, recalling her reaction to the fire. "I grabbed my kids' pictures. I made three calls, the fire department, then my husband, who was in Mist, then my neighbor. After that I got out of there," she said. "My first thought was that I was going to lose my house."

Eric Olson, volunteer fire fighter, commented, "We have a lot more trouble with chimney fires than we should have. People's chimneys get old and this happens," he said. "The problem is, people can't afford to have their chimneys fixed. Even so, they should keep them clean," he continued. "You can run a stiff chimney brush up and down, or I know of some who take a burlap bag and fill it, tie a rope to it and run that up and down the chimney," he added. "Anything is better than nothing," he said.

The fire department warns that keeping chimneys clean is a must. Further, the department cautions against burning green wood, which causes heat loss and accelerated build-up on chimneys.

"Woodstoves are the greatest thing around for heat," said Olson. "They can also be very dangerous if they're not taken care of," he added.



UP ON THE ROOF — Volunteer firefighters Greg Port and Don Skinner hose down the inside of the Bergerson's

chimney to extinguish smoldering soot. Regular chimney cleaning can help avoid danger from winter fires.

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