

Rash decision: Casino shuttle bus driver saves Grand Ronde family from fire

By Ron Karten

Smoke Signals staff writer

After 30 years of driving long-haul trucks, not much on or along the road fazes Jim Rash, 72.

In his retirement, the Salem resident drives a shuttle bus for Spirit Mountain Casino.

So, it was just more of what he'd seen before during the swing shift on Thursday, March 20, when he saw flames shooting out of the chimney of a Grand Ronde house.

"The rain cover was just glowing red," Rash said. "The fire was coming up around it. It was putting off weird looking sparks."

Located along State Highway 18, the house sits between the casino and Wandering Spirit RV Park to where Rash was shuttling a casino visitor. He pulled the bus over and enlisted his passenger's help. Her name, Rash said, was Roxane Moore.

It was 3:30 in the morning. "I came around the corner on the highway," Rash said. "I came out of the curve and saw the fire in the chimney." The house is on the south side of Highway 18, east of Grand Ronde Road.

"I pulled into the parking area in front of the house. I asked her if she would help. She just jumped out of the bus and banged on the door until she woke them up."

Rash called the casino to have them call the West Valley Fire Department, covering Sheridan and Willamina.

"It took a good 20 minutes for them to arrive. I was kind of surprised to see that," Rash said.

The log at the Willamina Fire Department, which took the emergency call, said that response time was 10 minutes.

"Actually, that's really good for three o'clock in the morning," said Assistant Chief Dave Meier.

"We were just lying down for the night," said Terry Spinks III, who is engaged to be married to Crystal Neill, a hostess and cashier at Spirit Mountain Casino.

"We both work late shift," Spinks said. He works at Fort Hill gas station.

"We heard somebody at the door," Spinks said.

Neither he nor Neill knew at the time that the chimney was on fire. "They told us and we put out the fire," Spinks said.

"The young man and I were able to get the thing under control," Rash said. "He was heating the house with a fireplace and the whole thing had caught on fire."

"It was bad," said Spinks' father, Terry Spinks Jr., who at the time of the interview after the fire was long out was watching TV on the living room couch. "We almost died," he said. "Make it sound good."

"He wasn't here," Spinks III added.

"The fireplace was a roaring inferno," Rash said. "I went in and he was raking the fire down, so it quit roaring."

"At the time, I did not know that the house had a metal roof, but it probably saved the place. The house never did catch on fire."

"He (Spinks III) was very collected about what he needed to do."

"The chimney needed to be swept," Spinks III said.

"We just moved here in February," Neill said, "and we didn't know."



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

Jim Rash, a shuttle bus driver for Spirit Mountain Casino, called the fire department and helped put out a flue fire in this Grand Ronde house on Highway 18 on Thursday, March 20. He was taking a casino visitor home when he drove past the house and saw flames coming out of the chimney. The passenger knocked on the door to alert the residents while Rash called the fire department.

"It's a good pitch for metal roofs," Rash said.

Rash told Spinks and Neill to vacate the house until the fire department arrived, and at the day's darkest hour they were left standing in the wet night in their pajamas.

Rash said he went through the rooms to ensure nobody and no pets were forgotten.

"Everything's fine," Spinks III said afterward. "It didn't burn nothing. It was no problem at all."

When the fire department arrived, according to Meier, "The people were on the porch and the fire had self-extinguished by the time we got there. There were a couple smoldering embers when I

got there. We checked the chimney, the walls and the attic."

"When the fire department rolled up, I left to get out of the way," Rash said. "Then I dropped her (his passenger) off and went back to the casino."

"It was just a regular graveyard shift at Spirit Mountain Casino," Rash said. "It was actually a pretty slow night. I was out probably six to eight times before and maybe two or three after."

"I feel like I done a civic duty and anybody would have done the same," Rash added. "I would hope that if my home was on fire, the first person who went by would tell me."

"It's part of life. We got to take care of each other." ■

Career day



Photos by Michelle Alaimo

Above, John Harp, Part-Time College Program coordinator for the Tribe, talks to Willamina Middle School at Grand Ronde students during the first annual Middle School Career Day on Wednesday, April 9. At right, Michael Rogers, a seventh-grader at Willamina Middle School at Grand Ronde, examines a specimen of bentgrass during a session with the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

