

Friends save home in middle of fire

By Angel Carpenter
Blue Mountain Eagle

Sam Palmer, of Seneca, who lost three houses in the Canyon Creek Complex, helped to save his best friend's home.

The deck of Tad Houpt's home, a half-mile up the canyon near Canyon City, had caught on fire.

Palmer and a friend headed up to Houpt's home.

"We used buckets at first then got a generator going and used a garden hose to pump water out of a pond," Palmer said. "We were in the middle of it — there was a lot of wind, heat, ash and fire."

He said at one point it felt the winds were blowing nearly 100 mph.

We kept at it until we got it," Palmer said.

Meanwhile, Houpt, who has a broken leg, had headed away from the fire.

He tried to flag his friend down when he passed them, then turned around when they didn't stop.

"I got to the bridge (to my house), and there was no way



Contributed photo/Yao Hui Huang
Tad Houpt, left, and Sam Palmer have been business partners and best friends for a long time. Last week, Palmer helped save Houpt's home from the Canyon Creek Complex fire.

to get across," Houpt said.

He says he's glad they saved his house, "but I'm re-

ally glad that they made it."

"Sam's been my best friend since we were 3 or 4

years old," he said. "As much as the house is worth, nothing is better than that."

'We're rising from the ashes'

Jason Wright's family owns only the clothes on their backs

By Nancy McCarthy
Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY — Jason Wright piled socks, underwear, jeans and shirts in a shopping cart in the Pavilion building at the county fairgrounds Monday. The clothing — all donated — signaled the start of a new life.

Wright and his family were in Pendleton when fire engulfed the Sheep Creek home they had rented for six years.

"We got a call at 11:30 Friday from a neighbor and he told me, 'Your house is on fire, and there's no reason to come back,'" Wright said.

"I didn't get my pictures of my daughter. I lost my pickup and four-wheeler. The only thing we had was the clothes on our backs," Wright said.

His wife, Aimee Wright, and daughter, Carle, are staying in a fifth-wheeler offered

to them by a local friend.

He described the experience in one word: "traumatic."

Yet, Wright, who has lived here since he was 2 years old, has nothing but praise for the community.

"I have to brag on the people around here," Wright said. "The way people are coming together is unbelievable. It's making me so happy to see what the community can do while going through so many changes."

Only one of Wright's neighbors' homes was saved, he said.

"God must have been watching her house. It's still standing," added Wright, who thanked the firefighters.

He looked over the clothes in his shopping cart and sighed.

"We're rising from the ashes, literally."



The Eagle Nancy McCarthy
Jason Wright collects donated clothing from the Pavilion. Fire destroyed the house that he and his family rented for six years.

Neighbor saves one house but loses his own

Nelson calls his friend a 'hero'

By Nancy McCarthy
Blue Mountain Eagle

Bryan Nelson gets tears in his eyes when he thinks about his neighbor's loss.

He calls Mike Mannell a "hero."

"He was building his house — a two-story cabin on Canyon Creek — for six years. It was his retirement dream home," Nelson said. When the Canyon Creek Complex fire hit the canyon, Nelson, who owns a house that he rents to tenants, was away. But Mannell was there.

"That day of the fire, he said the wind came up and there was a wall of fire coming right down the canyon," Nelson said.

Mannell ran to turn the sprinklers on at Nelson's house. The latest tenant had just moved



Contributed photo/Bryan Nelson
Although a portion of Bryan Nelson's property was scorched, the fire didn't reach his house, barn and outbuildings. Nelson credits neighbor Mike Mannell for saving the structures.

away; the house was empty.

"He turned the sprinklers on, he grabbed his guns," and he fled, Nelson said.

Mannell's nearly completed house, which he had built himself, burned to the ground. Nelson's house survived.

"He saved my house," Nelson said, pausing a bit to catch his composure. "I'm sure it helped. He had kept it mowed down all around it, and it was green."

Although the fire approached the house, nothing burned, not even the outbuildings.

"Everything was saved," Nelson said.

In addition to his house, Mannell's two antique cars, the camper he stayed in, a chicken house, two tractors and a horse trailer were destroyed. His horses survived.

Mannell is going to stay at Nelson's rental house for now, Nelson said.

Nelson displayed some photos he shot in the fire's aftermath. His barn and house are in the shot, with a patch of scorched earth in the forefront. Nelson shook his head at what could have been, had it not been for Mannell.

"He's a hero," Nelson said.

Retirees find home is safe, and the cat

Julie Reynolds: 'It sounded like a jet engine'

By Angel Carpenter
Blue Mountain Eagle

On Aug. 14, Julie and Dennis Reynolds heard

through the grapevine that their home, beyond J-L, had been destroyed in the Canyon Creek Complex fire.

The rumor, however, wasn't true.

"We were very fortunate," Julie said. "We have neighbors who did lose their home."

The day of the fire, they

had little time to get out.

"We could see it coming up over the hills — it sounded like a jet engine," she said.

They left their cat, Harry, behind.

"We all joined hands in prayer and just prayed for the home and safety for others," she said, adding they left at about 1 p.m.

When they returned to the property, they saw the fire had stopped at the paved road in front of their home and at Canyon Creek in the back yard.

"I couldn't believe it," she said.

They called out to their cat who was hiding in some bushes, safe.

ASSAULT FIRE BY AIR AND GROUND



Tammy Clark captured this shot of a fire retardant drop Sunday afternoon, Aug. 16. As weather conditions allow, crews put on a massive attack to the Canyon Creek Complex fire by air, with water and retardant drops, as well as by ground throughout the weekend, Aug. 14-16. Officials report 26 residences and over 100 structures have been destroyed. Nearly 575 crews are working the fire, which as of Tuesday, Aug. 18, is over 43,000 acres.

One vet saves another's life

Mike Mannell's friend woke him up as fire approached

By Angel Carpenter
Blue Mountain Eagle

CANYON CITY — While Bryan Nelson credited Mike Mannell for saving his house, Mike Mannell, in turn, praised another friend for saving Mannell's life.

"At 11 a.m., we were at a Level 3 evacuation," Mannell said. "I hadn't been notified or listening to the radio. I had laid down for a nap at 10 a.m."

At 11 a.m. a friend of mine from Mt. Vernon, Jeff Compton, a former U.S. Army ranger who spent three years in Iraq, came up to check on me."

He woke me up and told me the fire was behind my property up on the ridge, heading my way," he said. "Had he not come by and woke me up, I probably would have perished in the fire that day."

My wife Ginny was at work that day," he said.

"Jeff came back an hour later — I gathered all my guns out of the cabin — at the final minute, I ran through the smoke to save my Harley Davidson and parked it at Bryan Nelson's house next door under a sprinkler, and put a sprinkler on his house."

As a Vietnam veteran, U.S. Marines, Mannell said he feels, "the brotherhood is alive and well — that's the truth."

He added, "I want to give my friend Jeff Compton credit for saving my life — he's my brother."

Berry Creek Ranch home saved

By Angel Carpenter
Blue Mountain Eagle

CANYON CITY — Gordon and Julie Larson's home in the canyon at their Berry Creek Ranch was saved, but they lost three barns to the Aug. 14 fire.

"I'm so sorry for everyone who lost their homes," Larson said.

He's a retired Oregon State Police lieutenant and

had worked as OSP sergeant in John Day for several years.

His wife, Julie, works at John Day City Hall.

He recalled a young firefighter who had to be packed out of the area. A medical helicopter flew him out.

"I know those firefighters worked their tails off until midnight to get that out — the wind came through there," he said.

Airman loses home to fire

'There are no words,' said James Dunn

By Angel Carpenter
Blue Mountain Eagle

CANYON CITY — James Dunn, an active-duty airman, was coming home from Michigan, where he is stationed, when he heard about the Canyon Creek Complex fire.

On Thursday, Highway 26 was closed at Ontario, so he stayed the night there.

He came home Friday, but the first time he was able to see the Canyon City home where his wife, Judy, lives, was last Sunday. It was destroyed.

"There's no words to describe the devastation," he said. "The past 30 years, they haven't logged or cleared, and won't let us graze cattle — it worked all those previous years."

OFFICIALS POST INFORMATION



Shoppers check the Canyon Creek Complex fire information board set up by Forest Service officials at Chester's Thriftway in John Day. U.S. Forest Service officials have posted an information board on the Canyon Creek Complex fire at Chester's Thriftway in John Day. More information boards are planned for Mt. Vernon and Prairie City.