

**RISING**

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“When we got here, we were told it was a Level 1 (evacuation status),” Courtney said. “Ten minutes later, we were told, ‘You need to leave.’ We had no time at all.”

“We were in the eye of the storm,” Dean said.

After trying everything they could to save their home — and assuming they’d be able to save it — the couple left with little more than the clothes on their backs. When they left their burning home, the pair tried to help others save their properties.

One year later, the Foxes have rebuilt.

Thanks to Pendleton drafter and designer Gary Kopperud and Mt. Vernon contractor Byron Hughes, the family is putting the finishing touches on a new home built where the old one once stood.

But, “It hasn’t been all butterflies and rainbows,” Courtney said.

“We have insurance, but it went up considerably,” Dean said, adding they also had to install a new water system.

There have been emotional struggles as well.

“Some people say, ‘Get over it,’ but it’s still a deep thing,” Dean said.

He said he’s noticed that children deal with it differently and have a hard time talking about it. The thought of elderly people who lost everything to the fire is also painful, he said.

A wooden sign in their living room sums up where they are at this point: “Tough times don’t last — Tough people do.”

The couple expressed that the silver lining amidst all the stress has been the selfless giving shown by too many people to name.

“I feel, for the rest of my life, I need to pay it forward,” Courtney said, adding she knows she could never truly repay people’s generosity.

“There were people giving from near and far,” Dean said. “It was pretty overwhelming.”

He said he’s happy with life now, and thankful for their new home.

“I hope we can (all) learn from this destruction, and make changes, so it won’t happen again,” he said. “We’re moving forward. You have to move forward. If you look back, you’ll never have a future.”

“We’re keeping it positive,” Courtney said. “We’re proud. I feel like we won, because we didn’t let it destroy us. We struggled, and we overcame. We just don’t want it to happen again.”

Some whose properties



This is what was left of Dean and Courtney Fox’s home after the Aug. 14, 2015, Canyon Creek Complex fire.



The Eagle/Angel Carpenter  
**Dean and Betty Elliott’s cat Smudge was saved from last year’s fire.**

“That place on Canyon Creek was a dream come true,” she said, “and our new house will become a home, eventually.”

Another couple, Dean and Betty Elliott, lost everything in the fire, including their 115-year-old house where they lived for 53 years — but they still call Grant County home.

While they didn’t rebuild in Canyon Creek, the couple are rebuilding their lives in Prairie City.

“We’ve been accepted in Prairie City,” Betty said.

She said they could have moved near their daughter in the Willamette Valley, close to hospitals and doctors, but preferred to stay in the county.

“People were wonderful at taking care of us,” Betty said.

“That is one reason we’re still here,” Dean added. “We could have moved somewhere else and been a lot more comfortable, but we didn’t. We wanted to stay here.”

The Elliotts were known for their businesses, the Grizzly Bear Pizza Parlor, later called Gold Town Pizza, and the Wilderness Theater.

Dean Elliott worked as a reserve sheriff’s deputy for several years, serving under four sheriffs, and was chairman of the John Day Rural Fire Protection District. He said he’s felt bitter about the fire.

“Did it have to happen?” he said. “There was so much neglect — without that, it could have solved a lot of problems. We lost everything, so I guess it is what it is.”

“We just have to keep on keeping on.”



The Eagle/Angel Carpenter  
**Dean and Betty Elliott have moved to Prairie City since losing their Canyon Creek home to the August 2105 Canyon Creek Complex fire.**

burned in the fire moved out of the county, including Judith Beudet Reed and her husband, Robert Reed. After 26 years in Seneca and the Canyon Creek area, they moved to Burns.

“Life was so good in the canyon,” Judith said. “We had a beautiful place and awesome neighbors.”

Although their home in Canyon Creek, located below Rat-



The Canyon Creek Complex burned this home belonging to Dean and Courtney Fox shortly after this photo was taken.

tlesnake Ridge, was saved, their 30 timbered acres were charred, and they lost a historic barn, a shop, a bridge, their water system and many memories, she said.

“I couldn’t live in the ‘char-broiled acres’ — that’s what I renamed our place,” she said. “It was too heartbreaking. It’s heartbreaking for the whole community. Everybody was affected.”

She said she knows people who are still paralyzed by stress and depression over the experience.

“The minute we drop over Starr Ridge, it all comes back,” she said.

She plans to take a 45-minute commute to substitute teach at Seneca School, and Robert is retired from his career with the Forest Service, much of that time spent as a firefighter. Burns gives them an opportunity to stay fairly close to friends, she said.

**Last summer’s fire pushes bears to new food sources**

EO Media Group

A wildlife biologist said bears might cause problems in the John Day area this fall as they search for food sources to replace the berries and grass burned in the Canyon Creek Complex fire last year.

Ryan Torland, ODFW district biologist for Grant County, said residents should clean up fallen fruit around trees, avoid leaving pet food outside and keep garbage cans inside a garage or shed if possible.

Torland said there have already been a couple incidents with bears poking around homes on the outskirts of John Day.

Bears spend the fall eating heavily to build up fat for winter hibernation, Torland said in an ODFW news release. But the Canyon Creek Fire south of John Day last summer scorched a major food supply, and could send bears searching elsewhere, he said. Bears that raid garbage cans or fruit trees in residential ar-

reas could get habituated to them as a food source and cause trouble for homeowners, he said.

For bear tips, visit [dfw.state.or.us/wildlife/living\\_with/black\\_bears.asp](http://dfw.state.or.us/wildlife/living_with/black_bears.asp).

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**ATTENTION GRANT COUNTY VETERANS:**

Did you know there may be VA benefits available for you as a result of your spouses’ military service?

See your Grant County Veteran Services Officer today for more information, located at Grant County Court House.

**\* Call 541-575-1631 for an appointment \***

Open: Mon, Wed, & Fri 10am-4pm by appointment.

*- Thank You -*

We would like to thank each and every person that has so graciously donated money, items, time and emotional support to help us during the tragedy that took place in our canyon on August 14, 2015. We would also like to thank the local businesses and surrounding communities for their support to all of the fire victims. We will never be able to reach out to every person that donated to our family and we truly appreciate all the generosity from near and far. Our new beginning would not have been possible without the compassion of all you wonderful people.

And last but not least, a huge thank you to our employees. They have kept our livelihood intact while we rebuilt our new home!

With most sincere gratitude,  
The Fox Family

**Wishing Our Area Kids a Happy & Healthy New School Year**

We hope every one of your children has an outstanding school year! Let us help you get the children ready to get back to school! Now is a great time to call and get an appointment for your child’s Annual Wellness Exam or Sports Physical. We are also available for those times your child is not feeling 100% or needs vaccinations to be brought up to date. Our goal is to provide quality pediatric care and do our part in preparing your child for a successful school year.

Give us a call today! We are accepting new patients - and are always happy to see our established patients for a visit. In many cases, same day appointments are available.

**STRAWBERRY WILDERNESS COMMUNITY CLINIC**

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