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Firefighter injured in Petrolia house fire

Heather Wright
The Independent

A Petrolia/North Enniskillen firefighter had a narrow escape after falling through the floor of a burning building.

Crews from Petrolia/North Enniskillen, Oil Springs and Wyoming were called to Garden Crescent just before 10:30 am Feb. 27 and found the house near Heritage Heights Golf Course in flames. The fire moved through the home quickly but witnesses say there didn't appear to be an explosion.

Fire Chief Jay Arns says a heating and cooling company was working in the basement installing a ventilation system for a hot water heater when the fire started. Arns couldn't say if that was the exact cause.

The homeowners, Allan and Carol Morwood, were inside at the time. Allan got out of the house fighting through a cloud of smoke at the back door - leaving with only his sandals on.

His wife, found another way out on her own. (See more of their story on page 5.)

Following the fire, the chief said there were no injuries in the fire and dam-

age was not as extensive as it seemed.

"It looked big, but we saved a lot of the structure," he said estimating between \$150,000 and \$175,000 damage.

"The first floor is gone. The kitchen and the living room are now in the basement. There is no floor left. It will take extensive work to repair it, but the roof rafters are good. It is up to the insurance company, but I don't imagine they'll tear it down."

The homeowner disputes that opinion saying while the insurance company has yet to give a ruling, he expects to rebuild his home.

Arns confirmed to *The Independent* that one firefighter had been taken to hospital saying "He wasn't feeling good when he came out (of the home) so we erred on the side of caution."

The homeowner, witness at the scene and firefighters speaking anonymously said the incident was serious.

The Independent has learned that about 30 minutes into fighting the blaze, after the Morwoods and the repairmen on site had left the building, three firefighters were ordered to take a hose through the front door and "find the fire."

SEE FIRE PG 2

Multiple sources say the first firefighter got just inside the door when the floor collapsed.

One source says the floor was already crumbling in the back when the crews were sent in.

The firefighter hit a broken floor joist with his chest on the way down and landed on his back on top of his air pack.

Witnesses at the scene say firefighters outside heard the mayday call and brought a ladder to the point of entry. The firefighter was able to climb out.

Witnesses say he was taken by ambulance to hospital. Sources say the firefighter suffered bruising on his chest and smoke inhalation. He didn't return to his day job until Monday.

The Ministry of Labour says it was not contacted about the incident.

While accidents at construction sites and mines are to be reported immediately to the ministry, the rules surrounding injuries at a fire scene aren't as clear. A directive from the Ontario Fire Marshal says fire departments must report a fire if there was fatality or serious injury or if the damage to the building tops \$500,000.



HEATHER WRIGHT PHOTO

Homeowner Allan Morwood (right) talks with the OPP and neighbours as a firefighter leaves his burning home. Morwood escaped through the thick smoke with only his sandals on. A neighbour lent him some rubber boots and a coat.

Brooke-Alvinston council protects against grant cuts as taxes rise 4.7 per cent

Heather Wright
The Independent

Brooke-Alvinston Mayor Dave Ferguson says taxpayers' won't feel a pinch if the provincial government starts to cut funding

in 2019.

Municipalities across the region are waiting to hear what the provincial government will provide in the Ontario Municipal Partnership Fund. The finance minister has said the funding formula won't

change this year. Some politicians believe that means local municipalities, who have seen hundreds of thousands of dollars in cuts over the past five years, will get the same amount of money as 2018. But Brooke-Alvinston's Treasurer,

Stephen Ikert, is concerned the province will continue decreasing funding.

So, when council approved the 2019 budget in principle recently, it built the decrease into the budget.

"Four per cent of the increase is to cover the cut to OMPF," says Ferguson. "So, really, it is about a 0.7 per cent increase when you come right down to it."

SEE BROOKE PG 2

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Firefighter needed ladder to escape basement

CON'T FROM PG 1

The fire marshal should also be called if there had been an explosion which started the blaze.

Under the Occupational Health and Safety Act, employers have to contact the labour ministry if someone is killed or critically injured. Critical injuries are defined as life-threatening injuries, if someone is unconscious, broke a bone, lost a limb or a "substantial" amount of blood.

Several former chiefs and training officers who called The Independent concerned about the injury to a firefighter, questioned why he was sent in the building. One former chief says new homes

use lightweight construction and a failure of a floor is quite common and occurs without warning. "The last thing you want to do is put anyone on the floor," he says.

A former training officer adds; "If there is no life endangerment and everyone is safely out and it is a confirmed below grade structure fire, no crew member should enter or be directed to enter from above the known origin of the fire, due to the compromised stability of the structure."

Chief Arns, in an internal memo obtained by *The Independent*, acknowledged the incident adding the standby rescue team acted quickly to remove the man from

the basement. Arns said in the memo the fall didn't present "any immediate injuries."

The memo acknowledge the floor was softening due to the fire beneath it when the accident occurred.

The Independent contacted several seasoned fighters in leadership positions who said floor failures in newer homes are not surprising but it is unusual to have a firefighter fall through. There hasn't been an incident where firefighter was down in a burning building and a mayday was called in more than a decade in the region.

Under the Occupational Health and Safety Act, the town's health



HEATHER WRIGHT PHOTO

Firefighters look for another way into a burning Garden Crescent home Feb. 27. Fire officials say the blaze likely started as a hot water heater was being installed.

and safety committee will review the incident. It may make recom-

mendations to ensure something like this doesn't happen again.

BIG PARKS BOOST



Parents for Parks hopes to build a new accessible playground in the park adopted by the Petrolia Lions. The campaign's goal is to create a \$300,000 accessible playground at Greenwood Park. So the club has stepped up with a \$40,000 donation for the next two years. President Cheryl Schleihaus says the club wanted to upgrade the area last summer when she ran into Emily Denham-Weed and Emily Bright at the park and began talking about what could be done. Schleihaus says the Lions decided to work with pair and Erin Hawryluk who had already come up with a plan for equipment. The trio hope to raise the rest of the money in the community.

Brooke plans for cuts

CON'T FROM PG 1

"We took for granted the decrease because we wanted to be safe on that," says Ferguson. "If it comes in that we get the same money as last year, we have projects we need that for. There have been some repairs at the arena that have popped up in the last few days...It is not going to give us much cushion, but we can live with this."

The \$4.87 million operating budget and \$1.07 capital budget. The operating budget is a 8.6 increase in spending, much of that in protection services. The largest increase comes in the cost of policing. The OPP's contract for the area is up about five per cent or \$22,000 for 2019.

Spending on capital projects is expected to decrease by 8.2 per cent. The largest project will be on Lorne St. in Alvinston where a storm sewer needs to be fixed. "When there is rain there is always lots of flooding there," Ikert says.

The project is expected to cost about \$700,000. Ikert says the municipality has also applied for grants to repair Shiloh Line as well. That could cost upward of \$2 million.

Ikert says repaving part of Shiloh and replacing gravel with tar and chip will not go ahead without funding from the provincial government under the Ontario Community Infrastructure Program.

Council approved the budget in principle saying it will be formally passed when the province announces its grants.

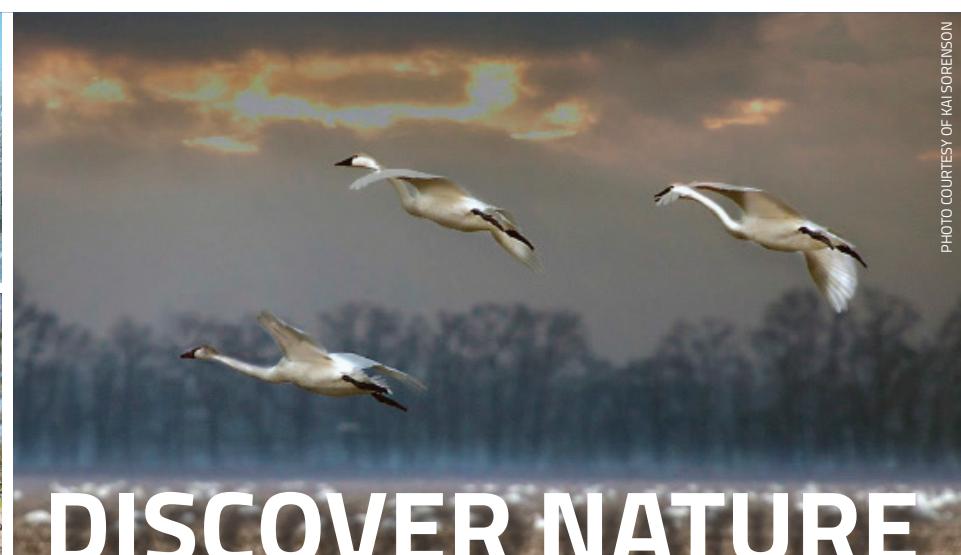


PHOTO COURTESY OF KAISORENSEN

DISCOVER NATURE

MARCH 11-15, 2019: 10:00am-5:00pm

Discover the annual **Return of the Swans Festival** at Lambton Heritage Museum. If conditions are right, you may witness thousands of tundra swans resting on the bog, attracted by the melt water of spring and the remnants of last year's corn crop. Enjoy activities for all ages, with hands-on electronics from **Makerspace** available 11:00am-3:00pm each day.

Updates on number of swans in the area at www.returnoftheswans.com



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