

Coe Hill homes burn to ground



Fire department tape surrounds the place where two Coe Hill homes burned to the ground on April 2, leaving two families homeless and without any possessions. JIM EADIE Special to This Week

By Jim Eadie

Two Coe Hill families are homeless, and have lost all of their possessions, after a mid-morning fire on Norman Lane in the hamlet on April 2. Two homes standing side by side on the street burned to the ground, despite the best efforts of the Wollaston Township Fire Department and local citizens.

"We were called to a garage fire at 25 Norman Lane," said fire chief Rick Middleton. "We had a quick response, but the flames were shooting up through the roof of the garage when we arrived."

The garage sat between the two homes, and it was apparent the fire had spread into both homes, as the interiors were already engulfed in flames.

"We had to adopt a defensive strategy quite quickly," he said. "There was a car on fire in the driveway. We had to remove other nearby cars from the scene, as well as propane tanks. Fortunately, there were no injuries to anyone." Middleton praised the work of his firefighters, and the assistance they received from Limerick Township Fire Dept., who operated the water shuttle with them. Firefighters remained on the scene for more than eight hours.

"Now the big job for firefighters is to clean and dry all of the hoses. As well, vehicles and firefighting suits need to be de-contaminated," said Middleton. "With even a bigger task now, today is the day that the property owners who have lost everything have to start rebuilding their lives."

Gary Hicks and Mary Burbidge owned and occupied one of the homes, and Jeanann Barnaby and her partner Steve the other; both families have lost everything. Neighbours and friends have rallied to their assistance.

A quickly set-up Go Fund Me account was established online by two local women, and in one day had already reached almost two-thirds of their target goal of \$3,000. "Susan Murray and I decided to set up the page to get them some immediate help," said Maryann-McConnell Post. "Thank you. Thank you. Thank you," said the first update on the website.

The fire also cancelled the Leonard Cohen tribute concert "Famous Blue Raincoat," which had been scheduled that night at Bancroft's Village Playhouse.

The concert, organized by Hicks, was in memory of his daughter Sarah, a North Hastings High School grad killed in a car crash. She is honoured by an award of merit presented to a NHHS student studying science.