

Fire leaves family homeless

Written by By Cody Begaye Sun Correspondent
Friday, 31 January 2020 04:51



Incident report in question

A blaze that broke out at a residence Jan. 17 has left a local family without a home and many of their belongings either burned or destroyed.

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SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

The day started off normally for Theresa Keemann and her family at their home about four miles south of Gallup.

“We got up, we turned a propane heater on,” Keemann said Jan. 22. “When we leave the house, we make sure everything’s off, like the propane heater and the propane stove.”

Keemann received a phone call from her son, who works for Dallago Corporation, who said he needed to be picked up. Afterwards, they stopped at Navajo Shopping Center, 1300 Chino Rd. in Gamerco, to pick up a propane tank and then did a number of other chores before her son said they should go back to their house.

But as Keemann and her family drove back home about 10 am, they saw something was wrong.

“When we got to the highway, we saw smoke coming out of the front of our house,” she said. “[My son] said, ‘I think something’s wrong with the house!’ As we were going up the hill, we noticed the house was on fire.”

Keemann said the front porch of the home was burning when they arrived. The family realized they could not stop the blaze on their own, so she called 911 three times.

Despite repeated calls to both 911 and the Navajo Nation Fire Department, help did not arrive until about an hour after the family got home.

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And even then, the assistance was not as effective as it could have been, Keemann said. Equipment errors like the hose starting and stopping and the fire truck not making it up the hill added to the stress of the situation.

“I felt like grabbing that hose and putting out the fire myself,” Keemann said.

FINDING THE SOURCE

Keemann said she does not know how the fire started. As such, she is not ruling out the possibility of arson, which she brought up to the Navajo Nation Police. She was told the police were going to talk to the fire marshall about the incident, but has not heard back.

The fire took a heavy financial and emotional toll on Keemann and her family.

“It was devastating,” she said. “I cried and cried, because my father built that house when I was five years old.”

Keemann said if the fire had been extinguished, a lot of their belongings could have been saved. But as is, a lot of sensitive personal documents, including birth certificates, Certificates of Indian Blood, and diplomas are gone. All of the family’s clothing is also gone.

Then, when Keemann received a copy of the incident report from the fire department Jan. 21, she found a lot of the information they recorded was not accurate, such as what was burning and when she called them.

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“I said, ‘This [report] is a lie,’” she said. “The hogan wasn’t on fire. The stove wasn’t on fire.”

In the aftermath of the blaze, Keemann said a number of people have been seen sifting through the remains of the house as if they were looking for anything to steal.

“That’s not right,” she said.

THE NEXT STEP

The family has a number of options for places to stay, but none of them are either long-term solutions or immediately ready for move-in. Keemann said a hogan given to them by her mother has issues with its roof, and a different house is under construction with no running water or electricity.

An offer from Navajo Housing Authority would include relocating about 40 miles from Gallup, which is too far given the family either works or attends school in Gallup.

On top of losing everything to a fire, Keemann and her family also had to deal with the aftermath of losing three of their relatives in a short span. She mentioned one of the funerals being set for the day following the fire.

Despite the hardship, Keemann is taking steps to keep her family together and rebuild from this

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incident.

“I’m dealing with Red Cross. They keep in touch with me psychologically and support us mentally,” Keemann said.

One of Keemann’s relatives has begun accepting donations to help the family on their way. Red Rock Chapter has also asked for donations at Navajo Spirit Southwestern Wear, 815 W. Coal Ave.

If you would like to help, the donation fundraiser is available on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/donate/581062872477429/>

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