

# New Jersey Herald

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### ON THE WEB



Local news, sports and more, only a click away.

Friday



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## Hamburg boy wakes to fire, alerts family

BY KATHY STEVENS  
AND PHILLIP MOLNAR  
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HAMBURG — Three apartments were damaged in a fire in a building on King Cole Road early Thursday morning, displacing three families who are temporarily being housed by the Sussex County Chapter of the American Red Cross.

Sgt. Erik Aaronson, of the Hamburg Police Department, said the fire was reported at 4:37 a.m. after being discovered by a 9-year-old resident of apartment 8. The boy alerted his parents, who called 9-1-1, he said.

Debra and James Steinbacher said their son, also named James, alerted them after he spotted a fan on fire in the house.

"He saved us all," Debra Steinbacher said of her son. "He's my little hero."

The three members of their family and their two

cats got out safely, but the home was ravaged by the fire.

"We lost everything," Debra Steinbacher said.

Aaronson said flames were visible outside when Officer Christopher Nichols responded to the fire. Most of the residents of the 14-apartment building were already outside and Nichols completed the evacuation of the building.

The Steinbachers' apartment was heavily damaged in the fire and the ones on each side — apartments 7 and 9 — suffered smoke and water damage, Aaronson said. About eight residents of those three apartments are being housed by the Red Cross, and those who live in the other apartments were allowed back inside the building, he said.

The Hamburg Fire Department was back on the scene at 10:31 a.m. when the fire rekindled in apartment 8.

It was quickly put out.

Aaronson said the Hamburg Police and Sussex County Fire Marshal are investigating the cause of the fire.

The Hamburg, Franklin, Hardyston and McAfee Fire Departments responded to the fire. Other responders were the Sussex County Fire Marshal, Hamburg, Hardyston and Franklin Emergency Squads and Jersey Central Power & Light. Hardyston and Franklin Police assisted the Hamburg Police.

The younger James Steinbacher said he does not want to be a firefighter when he grows up, but instead is looking forward to a career in the U.S. Army or as a professional skateboarder.

The humble hero did not want praise for his quick action.

"I just woke up and saw fire on the top of the fan," James said.



Photo by Phillip Molnar/New Jersey Herald

James Steinbacher, 9, stands in front of his fire-damaged apartment on King Cole Road in Hamburg. He woke up Thursday, saw fire and alerted his family.

## Jeep crashes into Stillwater home



Photo by Anna Murphey/New Jersey Herald

Stillwater resident Buddy Phillips, left, looks over the damage to his Stillwater Road house, where early Thursday morning a Jeep Cherokee crashed into the living room while his wife, Gigi, was asleep on the couch.

## Sleeping woman nearly hit

By LYND SAY CAYETANA BOUCHAL

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STILLWATER — A 21-year-old Stillwater man was arrested and charged after his 1996 red Jeep plowed into a house on Stillwater Road.

Christopher P. Carr was charged with DWI following the accident, which took out a wall and left debris strewn about the home of Gigi and Buddy Phillips.

Gigi Phillips, 67, was sleeping on her living room couch at 1:53 a.m. when the car rammed through the wall of

the house.

"I lifted my head just in time for a beam to come down on the pillow I was lying on," she said.

Her husband, also 67, who was asleep upstairs, thought he heard thunder. Then his wife screamed, "A car came through the house!"

Police said the car, traveling north on Stillwater Road, ran off the road over an embankment, hit a tree and a stone fence, then crashed into the house.

Carr suffered minor injuries and scratches and refused medical attention on

the scene, police said.

Gigi Phillips said her living room floor is covered in "glass and sheet rock and nails and wood."

The impact threw Buddy Phillips' lounge chair across the room, and picture frames and paintings were torn from the walls; the couple's oak furniture was destroyed.

"If we were both sitting on the couch, we'd be dead," she said.

After surveying the damage, she concluded: "My living room looks like a tornado hit it."

Neighbor Helen Bock, 80,

heard the collision.

"I looked out the window and I could have fainted," she said. "That car must have flown down that hill."

Because Gigi Phillips has a minor heart condition, family members insisted that she seek medical attention at a hospital, but she refused to leave her damaged house.

"She was so shook up she couldn't get her breath," Buddy Phillips said. "She has asthma. The first aid squad came and gave her oxygen."

The crash knocked out the

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## Bear reports on the rise

By BRUCE A. SCRUTON

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The number of black bear incidents reported to state wildlife officials continues to climb in New Jersey, with the number of serious incidents up about 31 percent over the same month-long period of a year ago.

Those incidents include a black bear killed as it emerged from a Vernon house, bears entering dining halls at youth camps, one smart enough to find a cool spot to rest on a hot day, and another that entered a home and emptied the refrigerator, according to a recently released state report. The reports are prepared monthly by the Division of Fish and Wildlife's Black Bear Unit for the Fish and Game Council.

The killing of the bear is among the more serious incidents during the latest reporting period — June 21-July 20. The report also mentions a hiker knocked down and injured by a bear in Ringwood State Park, and several reports of bears killing livestock, mostly chickens.

For the first time this year, the division received reports from farmers of bears raiding cornfields, mostly sweet corn being grown for sale as produce.

A West Milford bear apparently is smarter than the average bear, as it was

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## Vernon manager quits; 3 council members walk out

By PHILLIP MOLNAR

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VERNON — A public council meltdown during Thursday night's meeting — prompted by the resignation of the fifth township manager this year — resulted in three council members separately walking away from the meeting early, which caused it to end 35 minutes after it began.

Township Manager Andy Katz had just resigned a few hours before the start of the council meeting, Township Attorney John Ursin announced to the crowd of about 50 people at the start of the meeting. Katz had been township manager for just

seven weeks.

Then, Deputy Mayor Harry Shortway announced to the crowd he would be withdrawing his controversial ordinance to move open space money to other funds, which was actively opposed by the public.

"I don't know where to start," Councilman Michael Pier said after Shortway spoke. "I would like to adjourn the meeting. I just can't concentrate."

Mayor Sally Rinker suggested Pier leave while the rest of the council continued on with the meeting. Ursin said the council had to at least approve executive ses-

sion minutes from June.

This created even more of a problem for the visibly shaken council. At the June 24 meeting, two of five of the council members had voted in executive session — an apparent violation of the Open Public Meetings Act — to sue sitting Councilman Richard Carson (who himself is suing the township in a federal civil rights conspiracy case).

Rinker alluded to the executive session minutes not showing who "gave the affirmative" to sue Carson and wanted her own amendment to the minutes voted on. As confirmed by Rinker and

Carson, only Councilwoman Valerie Seufort and Shortway were at the executive session and able to make the decision to sue Carson; Pier was absent, Rinker abstained, and Carson was asked to leave the room.

Rinker attempted to give more information about what had occurred, but was stopped short by Ursin. Because, according to Ursin, closed session minutes could not be discussed in public, the council left the room to discuss the amendment in closed session — leaving a confused public to wait.

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Photo by Amy Paterson/  
New Jersey Herald

Vernon Township Manager Andy Katz, left, shown with Mayor Sally Rinker at the June 24 council meeting, has resigned.