

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 25, 2008

Christmas Trees, Candles Can Be Deadly Combination

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PITTSBURGH (AP) — The handheld Nintendo was carefully wrapped and placed on the dining room table. Upstairs were the gifts Santa would put under the tree on Christmas Eve. The tree was ready to go up. Instead, while driving her daughter to a party, Lisa Cochran got a call telling her all had been destroyed in a devastating fire.

It remains unclear what caused the fire in Cochran's suburban Pittsburgh home, flattening it and the house of her next-door neighbor, Teea Gantt.

What is clear is that winter — especially around the Christmas holidays with the combined hazards of trees, candles, electric lights and space heaters — is the hot season for home fires.

More home fires occur between Christmas Eve and Jan. 6 than at any other time of the year, and Christmas tree fires are especially deadly, with an average of one in 15 resulting in death, compared to one in 131 overall, according to the National Fire Protection Association.

"This is always a bad time of year," said Fire Chief Duane Dick, of the volunteer fire department in Pitcairn, a town about 15 miles east of Pittsburgh, whose company responded to the 10:30 a.m. call on Dec. 13 that the Cochran home was ablaze.

Fire officials urge consumers already out shopping for Christmas gifts to look at smoke detectors as well.

But consumers may be surprised to learn that the standard-issue ionization smoke detectors in an estimated 90 percent of American homes might not alert them of a fire in time to escape. Gantt said the smoke in her home was thick by the time she was awakened by her barking dog, but none of her detectors had gone off.

The detector preferred by the U.S. Fire Administration has dual ionization and photoelectric systems, alerting people to different types of blazes. The ionization systems recognize high flaming fires, such as those caused by cooking grease, while the photoelectric systems have an optical sensor that is more sensitive to smoke.

One of the newest technologies is a wireless network that triggers all the smoke detectors in a building nearly simultaneously once a fire is sensed.

"Just making sure that people have a working smoke detector in their home makes a significant difference in the threat (of personal injury) that there is from fire at their home, especially at this time of year," said Gregory Cade, the assistant administrator for the U.S. Fire Administration.

Cochran and Gantt, both single mothers, lost thousands of dollars in clothing and furniture in the fire, as well as items, such as photos, that are irreplaceable. The American Red Cross provided both families temporary shelter at a nearby Holiday Inn.

Neither has insurance and they are both hoping donations will help them buy new clothing for themselves and their children, as well as recoup some of the Christmas gifts lost in the fire. Cochran has a 5-year-old daughter, and Gantt has three children, aged 7, 6 and 3.

"We have lost everything," Gantt said. "The only thing that we were able to save was my son's bike that was outside."

Between 2003 and 2006, U.S. fire departments responded annually to an average of 240 home fires caused by Christmas trees, according to the most recent data collected by the National Fire Protection Association. These fires led to an average of 16 deaths, 25 injuries and \$13.1 million in damage each year.

Pittsburgh Fire Chief Darryl Jones said Christmas trees should be watered and put far from a heat source that can dry them out or ignite them. Extension cords and other electrical supplies should have a "UL" or Underwriters Laboratories label so it is clear the product has been tested for safety, he added, noting that overextending the power supply of a cord can cause it to heat up and ignite other flammable items nearby.

"Having a tragedy like this around the holidays is something you never forget. You always associate the holiday with that tragedy," Jones said.

Fire officials agree smoke detectors are crucial to saving lives. But choosing one can be tricky.

Cade, from the fire administration, said **CHRISTMAS TREES**, Page C2

FROM DAYS GONE BY

20 Years Ago

From The Files Of December 29, 1988

'88 Fulton County commissioners Tuesday gave final approval to a 1989 county budget which calls for a three-mill increase in real estate taxes to a level of 19 mills.

Leslie Sweger of Waterfall, retired Vehicle Shop Division employee at Letterkenny, is one of eight civilian workers who will be honored during a special ceremony at the Pentagon on January 9. They will receive the Secretary of Defense Productivity Excellence Award for saving the company more than \$2 million last year.

Births at the Medical Center: a son to Mr. and Mrs. Robert Skidmore of Warfordsburg on December 20; a son to Mr. and Mrs. Jeffrey McCarty of Hancock on December 20; a son to Mr. and Mrs. Larry Peck of Hustontown on December 20.

Specials at the IGA: grapefruit, 4 for 99 cents; cabbage, 25 cents lb.; russet potatoes, 10-lb. bag, \$1.49; chicken breast, \$1.19 lb.

Airman William Sipes, son of Carl and Barbara Sipes of Warfordsburg, has graduated from Air Force basic training at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas.

Deaths: Omar B. Mongold, McConnellsburg; Lloyd Kerlin, McConnellsburg; Charles Koontz Jr., Pennknoll Village; Vivien Loudon, Allentown; John W. Peck, Shippenburg.

Jill Truax of Big Cove Tannery received a degree in music performance at Indiana University of Pennsylvania in December.

30 Years Ago

From The Files Of December 14, 1978

'78 Marcus Downes of Fort Littleton was at the courthouse on Monday and bought the first lifetime fishing license to be sold in the county. The Fish Commission is offering the lifetime memberships to anyone over 65 for \$10.25, instead of \$2.25 each year.

The last of a TB-infected Fulton County dairy herd was hauled off to be slaughtered Tuesday, temporarily leaving a Needmore area dairy farmer without the means of making his livelihood. All 119 head of cattle on the farm were ordered destroyed last week after the state Department of Agriculture confirmed that tuberculosis had been found in the herd. The outbreak was discovered during a routine federal inspection at a Philadelphia slaughter house and traced back.

Holiday parties are in full swing with workers at JLG and the Grove company enjoying banquets and entertainment at the Venice in Hagerstown and those at P&W Excavating, Richards Auto Sales and the Medical Center gathering at the American Legion for dining and dancing on various nights last week.

The trailer home of Mrs. Benny Mills of Needmore was completely destroyed by fire last Wednesday night. The Hancock Fire Co. responded to the alarm, but firemen were unable to save the structure, which was completely gutted and all the contents destroyed.

Specials at the IGA: tangelos, 12 for 99 cents; Pepsi Cola, 64 oz., 79 cents; Gold Medal flour, 69 cents, 5 lbs.; Duncan Hines layer cake mixes, 59 cents.

Births at the Medical Center: a daughter to Mr. and Mrs. Willis Decker of Harrisonville on December 10; a daughter to Mr. and Mrs. Robert Zeis of St. Thomas on December 11; a son to Mr. and Mrs. Gregory Dorty of Mercersburg on December 12; a daughter to Mr. and Mrs. Fred Fleming of Hustontown on December 12; a son to Mr. and Mrs. Larry Gearhart of McConnellsburg on December 12; a son to Mr. and Mrs. Eugene Mellott of Needmore on December 12.

Marriage licenses: Thomas Ray Hann, Chambersburg, and Rebecca Laura Kendall, McConnellsburg; William Nicholas and Diana Smith, both of Chambersburg; Luke Hill, Big Cove Tannery, and Christina Schepis, Harrisonville.

Deaths: William Pasco Anderson, Harrisonville; Ralph Nye, Chambersburg; Emory Showman, Hancock.

40 Years Ago

From The Files Of January 2, 1969

'69 Dr. Walter R. Grissinger, well-known McConnellsburg dentist, was elected worshipful master for 1969 at the December meeting of Mt. Zion Lodge. He succeeds R. Kirk Cover as leader of the local lodge.

Nineteen Fulton County men completed a 20-hour auxiliary police procedure training course for Civil Defense activities, which was held at Hustontown Firehall on Tuesday evening for a period of eight weeks. Those completing the course were: Clark Brant, Harold Carmack, Horace Feight, Scott Fisher, Richard Fortney, Norman Hawkins, Willis Heefner, Harold Lockard, Frank Martz, Fred Martz, LeRoy McGowan, Clair Miller, Foster Park, Harry Swope, Ray Tice, Lloyd Covert, Robert Covert, Marvin DeShong and John Foreman.

A state trooper's duty is to stop and investigate anything unusual or suspicious. When a patrolling officer from the local substation sighted a middle-aged man, wearing a ski mask and going like blazes on a 3 1/2 hp mini bike north on Route 522 the day after Christmas, he stopped the weird-looking rider. It turned out he was no bank robber making a fast getaway, but a visitor from the Midwest, and the mini-bike was a Christmas present he was testing in the bitter cold weather.

Visiting at Fulton County Medical Center has been drastically cut as a safety measure against the spreading flu virus. Only the seriously ill are being allowed visitors and then only one family member at a time.

Among the students home for the holidays were Nancy and John Greathead, Paul Mellott and Jeff and John Culler.

Birth at the Medical Center: a son to Mr. and Mrs. Glenn Jones of Neelyton on December 22.

Mr. and Mrs. Levi Seville of Big Cove Tannery celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary on Sunday, November 24, at the firehall in McConnellsburg.

Miss Virginia M. Cunningham and Joseph J. Stafford Jr. were united in marriage on Sunday, December 22, at Macedonian UB Church in Greencastle. Parents of the couple are Mr. and Mrs. Russell Cunningham of Chambersburg and Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Stafford Sr., Wells Tannery.

Engagements: Mr. and Mrs. Charles Palmer of Warfordsburg announce the engagement of their daughter, Cheryl Catherine, to Clemente Andy Ciampa, son of Mr. and Mrs. Andy Ciampa of Three Springs. Mrs. Dorothy Kendall of Chambersburg wishes to announce the engagement of her daughter, Diane Peck, formerly of McConnellsburg, to Private First Class Richard A. Black,

MEMORY JOGGER



This week's Memory Jogger was submitted by The Fulton County Historical Society and pictures the four Gordon brothers, James, John, Earl and Glenn, sons of Ken and Lois Gordon. They earned many Future Farmers of America awards, including the Keystone Farmer Degree. C.B. Chubb was their advisor and was also the photographer of this picture, which was taken around 1954.

son of Mr. and Mrs. Harold E. Black of McConnellsburg.

Deaths: Henry Thomas Mellott, Mt. Union; Mrs. Grace V. Houck, Burnt Cabins; Harry T. Kline, Harrisonville; Grover C. Richesson, Mercersburg; Raymond J. Everetts, Huntingdon; Jesse E. Clark, Swissvale; Hilda Marie Wilson, Clear Ridge; Benjamin F. Miller, St. Charles, Mo.; Mrs. Elizabeth McCullough, Mercersburg.

50 Years Ago

From The Files Of January 1, 1959

'59 Fulton County's district attorney died suddenly at his home in McConnellsburg on Christmas Eve, just a day after he returned home from a long hospitalization at Chambersburg Hospital as the result of injuries received in an automobile accident. The victim of the coronary occlusion, John W. Mentzer, 65, died suddenly at about 11:30 o'clock Christmas Eve in the living room of his home where he and other members of his family had just finished opening their Christmas gifts. Mr. Mentzer had returned to his home here on Tuesday from the Chambersburg Hospital after having been a patient there since September 17 when he sustained a broken right leg, broken right arm and a fractured right knee in an automobile accident north of McConnellsburg. A lawyer in McConnellsburg since 1931, Mr. Mentzer was serving his fifth four-year term as district attorney of Fulton County. He also served as solicitor to the commissioners.

Raymond L. Snyder, son of Mr. and Mrs. George R. Snyder of McConnellsburg, has completed a 25-month course in X-ray technology in Philadelphia.

Guy Souders, local employee of the State Highway Department, suffered a fractured left leg on Tuesday morning on Tuscarora Mountain. Souders was trimming brush on a steep grade when he slipped and fell, breaking both bones of the leg below the knee. He is now a patient in Chambersburg Hospital.

Mr. and Mrs. Harold Martin of Warfordsburg announce the engagement of their daughter, Iris, to Paul A. Hendershot, son of Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Hendershot of Warfordsburg.

Some of the happiness which occurs at Christmas must have been dampened for the five children of Mrs. Mary Chamberlain of Wells Tannery if they permitted themselves to think of what was in store for them just three short days after the visit of old St. Nick. On December 28, all five were admitted to Fulton County Medical Center and the next day underwent operations for the removal of their tonsils and adenoids. The five were Mary, 15; twins Carl and Carlette, 11; Judith, 9; and Ellen, 7. All were discharged from the hospital on December 30.

Mr. and Mrs. Elmer Sowers of McConnellsburg announce the engagement of their daughter, Beulah, to Harold Fix, also of McConnellsburg.

On Friday, fire threatened the home of Kenneth Fraker at Fort Littleton. The fire reportedly started in a fireplace and quickly spread to the gable end of the house. Two firemen, Donald and Marlin McQuade, were cut by flying glass while removing outside boards to reach the flames. Credit for saving the Fraker home from total destruction was given to the new fire truck with its large tank of water. With this truck, firemen had on hand 1,100 gallons of water, which was enough to bring the fire under control. It was later learned that an explosion of undetermined origin occurred inside the house before the arrival of firemen, which moved the house about two inches on its foundation. Firemen estimated the damage to the gable end and roof of the home at \$4,000.

On Sunday, firemen were called to the Jack Weller home on Strawberry Ridge where an overheated stove pipe caused a fire in the second story of the building.

William Logan Kendall and Patricia Ann Shockey were married on December 21.

Birth at the Medical Center: a daughter to Mr. and Mrs. Ray M. Gible of McConnellsburg on December 24.

Deaths: J. Frank Cook of Hagerstown; Chester Truax of Wells Tannery

SP-4 Elliott Deshong Jr. and Naomi Alice Mellott were married on December 18.

Marine Cpl. William W. Tritle, son of Mr. and Mrs. William M. Tritle of McConnellsburg, is presently serving with the First Marine Brigade at the Kaneohe Base Marine Corps Air Station, Oahu, T.H.

Deaths: Mrs. Sarah Jennie Fritz, 101, of Port Royal; Mrs. Evelyn Steach of Phoenix, Ariz.; Clifford J. McLaughlin, Greencastle; Lauren Linford Taylor of McConnellsburg; Howard H. Strait of Mercersburg.

60 Years Ago

From The Files Of January 6, 1949

'49 The dead bodies of Harry C. Barges, 28, of Mercersburg and Miss Pauline Virginia Keel, 21, of Bedford were found in a parked station wagon at the Mercersburg Academy early Monday morning. The couple had died from monoxide poisoning.

Mr. and Mrs. Willis Bair of Shade Gap announce the birth of a daughter on December 31.

Twenty-six members and guests of the class of 1947 of MHS attended a banquet at the Fulton House on New Year's Eve, marking the class' first reunion.

County treasurer Harry M. Elvey announced this week that 2,356 resident hunting licenses had been sold in Fulton County in 1948, in addition to 135 non-resident licenses.

Mr. and Mrs. Robert Munro of Oakmont have announced the engagement of their daughter, Rena, to Paul Ott, son of Mr. and Mrs. Ross Ott of McConnellsburg.

Mr. and Mrs. Herman Grace of Waterfall have announced the engagement of their daughter, Frances, to Walter Fix of Hustontown.

Mr. and Mrs. Norman Miller of Robertsdale are the proud parents of a daughter, born on December 31.

Wedding congratulations are being extended to William Baumgardner and Ruth Mowan and to Ellis Batzell and Phyllis Sprowl.

Deaths: Mrs. Mary Ellen Gelvin of Fort Littleton; James F. Foutz of Juniata Gap.

70 Years Ago

From The Files Of January 5, 1939

'39 Deaths: Mrs. Frank Campbell of near Orbisonia; Samuel Edward Zimmerman of near Sylvan; Esther Lenora Hess of Ayr Township.

Fulton Countians admitted to Everett Hospital last week were Albert Fisher of Amaranth for severe lacerations of the face and Mrs. Nora Edwards of Big Cove Tannery for medical treatment. Discharged were Edwin Brant of Waterfall and Mrs. Virgie Humbert of Big Cove Tannery.

A total of 24 farmers enrolled last week for the dairy short course which is being offered by the Agriculture Department of the Warfordsburg High School.

For the third year, Rev. William J. Lowe has been honored by having one of his sermons published in the "Minister's Annual," a book which publishes many of the outstanding sermons of the year. Rev. Lowe's sermon, "A Victorious Church," was originally delivered at a synodical meeting.

Five men from the Chambersburg Lions Club judged the homes of McConnellsburg on Friday evening in the Christmas decorating contest sponsored by the local club. First prize went to George Mosser, second to A.C. Gress and third to Harry Ott. Honorable mention was given to Herman Mellott, Kenneth Glazier, Wilbur Grissinger and Charles Reeder.

Next Tuesday, January 10, Mr. and Mrs. Francis M. Taylor of town will mark their golden wedding anniversary.

At the worship service in the United Presbyterian Church last Sunday, a set of offering plates was presented to the congregation and dedicated by the pastor, Rev. Frank Findley, D.D. They were given by Philip Rotz and family and Russell Nelson and bear the inscription: "To the glory of God and in memory of John Sloan Nelson, 1842-1928, Mary Pittman Nelson, 1857-1930; their daughter, Arabe Nelson Rotz, 1881-1933."

Cupid's bow and arrow did better in Fulton in 1938 than for several years, 82 couples became licensed to wed.

Three of the latest couples to receive a marriage license here were Reed Carbaugh of Webster Mills and Mary Weller of Mercersburg; John W. Dyer and Alma G. Bernhard, both of Hancock, and Paul W. Pittman and Martha J. Thomas, both of Mercersburg.

Walter Sloan, newly elected Republican representative of Fulton County, was seated on Tuesday in the House of Representatives at Harrisburg when the General Assembly convened to consider weighty problems which will require a session lasting at least four or five months.

Mrs. Fred Reichley has returned to her home here after being hospitalized for three weeks in Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore.

George King of Fairview butchered three spring pigs on Tuesday which dressed 942 pounds.

Mrs. Martha Deshong of Needmore had the misfortune to fall on the ice last week, fracturing several ribs. Carl Wright of Wells Tannery, who has been serious-

