

BREAKING EDITOR'S PICK

Good Samaritan alerts family to Axton house fire and helps rescue two dogs

Parker Cotton

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Mike Lee, the deputy director of public safety in Pittsylvania County, assesses the damage of a trailer fire on Tuesday morning in Axton. Parker Cotton/Register & Bee

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AXTON — Morgan Burd only had about a half hour to relax before she was calling 9-1-1. After spending Monday night and part of early Tuesday morning filling in on a friend's newspaper delivery route — a nice gesture that came to an early end because of car trouble — Burd, 16, hoped to eat breakfast and take a nap before starting her virtual school day.

Her parents dropped her and the malfunctioning Chevy Malibu off at their home at 17372 Martinsville Highway around 7:15 a.m. Then her parents went to work.

At 7:43 a.m., Burd called 9-1-1 after a man pounded on her front door to alert her to a fire in a mobile home also on the property — where Burd's aunt and cousin live.

"Smoke was coming from the back half, right toward our house," Burd said. "There was smoke coming out everywhere."

The man, who had been driving on U.S. 58, pulled over once he saw the smoke. Burd said he had tried knocking on the door of the trailer but received no answer. The trailer sits just a few dozen feet away from Burd's home.

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She knew her aunt and her son were at work and school, respectively, but two dogs were inside. Burd said the man helped her coax Opie, a male boxer, and Piper, a female pit bull, out of the home.

“[Piper] doesn’t like men very well, so she was hesitant to come out when the guy tried to get her to come out,” Burd said. “I called her name to signify that I was here, that she was OK, and she ran out.”

The man, whose name Burd never learned, moved his truck to make room for the soon-to-arrive fire engines. Meanwhile, Burd got the dogs onto the porch of her home and continued calling various family members.

“After he got the dogs out and everything, I was standing on the porch and saw flames come out the top,” she said. “I’ve always been taught to stay calm, keep your head, when any emergency happens.”

Fire crews from Brosville, Axton, Bachelors Hall and Tunstall responded to the blaze. Mike Lee, the deputy director of public safety in Pittsylvania County, said an electric space heater likely started the fire.



Fire crews believe an electric space heater started the fire on Tuesday morning in Axton.

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Flames engulfed the trailer’s master bathroom and melted away a washer and dryer set and a deep freezer, among various other possessions.

Upon receiving a call about the fire, Cassy Leach, Burd’s aunt, raced back home from her job at Southern Finishing in Martinsville.

“I don’t want to get pulled over,” Leach, 30, said of her mindset while driving, “because I was booking it.”

Darryl Burd, Morgan’s father, also turned right around shortly after arriving at his job at Wallace Automotive in Martinsville.

“I wasn’t at work long,” he said. “My phone at work was blowing up.”

They both returned to find Morgan and the dogs safe.

“Until you see that everybody is OK, you can’t tell your anxiety, ‘Hey, it’s cool, chill,’” Leach said. “So I was freaking out on the way over here.”

Leach said she is in the process of moving to Martinsville, with the electricity being turned on in a new place as early as this week. She was hopeful that her son's furniture and belongings were salvageable from the side of the trailer that didn't see any fire damage.

"I'm hoping all of his stuff, other than being smokey, can be saved," she said. "Hopefully, because I wasn't planning on buying all of that stuff and moving. It wasn't budgeted in."

All of the outlets in the trailer had been replaced at one point, Leach said, because of past issues with them getting hot. The unit is old and the electricity is not very good, she said, so maybe the wiring behind the outlet made running the space heater more of a risk.

"But at the same time, I can't let it be cold in the house for the dogs," Leach said.

Leach said the damage could have been far worse if not for Morgan's quick thinking and the generosity of a passing motorist.

"She saved the day here. She kept her composure. She called 9-1-1 while making sure the dogs were out," Leach said of her niece. "She did all of that by herself with just a stranger who was nice enough to say, 'Hey, it looks like that place is on fire.'"

The man hung around long enough to see the fire be put out and meet the family, but he left without anybody learning his name.

"He took off so quickly," Leach said. "I gave him a hug and thanked him."

Morgan, a Tunstall High School student, was only home alone because it was a virtual learning day for her. She was exhausted after a long night and morning of delivering the Martinsville Bulletin with her 18-year-old sister Kaitlyn, only for the Malibu to break down with one box of papers left.

Her parents retrieved the sisters and towed the car back home. Morgan had gone nearly a full day without sleep and was looking forward to some much-needed shut-eye.

The fire disrupted those plans, but she, too, was grateful for the man whose name she doesn't know for being kind enough to stop and try to help.

"I'm very thankful," she said. "If it wasn't for him, I wouldn't have known any of this was happening. It probably by then would have spread to our house, and our house would be gone too."

PHOTOS: Axton fire



Mike Lee, the deputy director of public safety in Pittsylvania County, assesses the damage of a trailer fire on Tuesday morning in Axton.

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A mobile home in Axton was the site of an electrical fire on Tuesday morning.

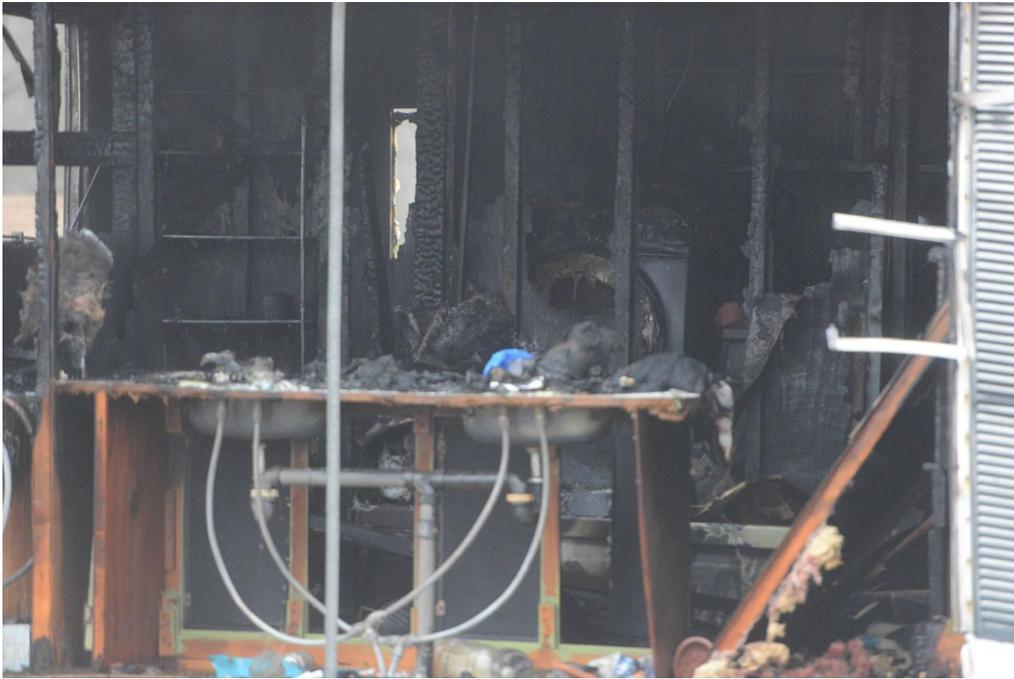
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Fire crews believe an electric space heater started the fire on Tuesday morning in Axton.
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A pile of burnt siding sits outside the mobile home.
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The fire burned away the siding of the mobile home, revealing a charred bathroom and melted appliances.
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The fire caused heavy damage to several appliances in the home.
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The fire caused heavy damage to the bathroom of the home.
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The fire burned out the siding of the mobile home.
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Fire crews from Brosville, Tunstall, Bachelors Hall and Axton all responded to the blaze.
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