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'Everything we own fits in a milk crate'

Community rallies around Ennis family following fire that left their home in ashes



BY LUKE CHRISTOPHER

The Ennis family stands on what used to be the main door of their home in Gid Brown Hollow.

BY JULIA SHANAHAN
Rappahannock News staff

Shannon Ennis' background as a Rappahannock County Fire and Rescue volunteer did not prepare her to see her own home engulfed in flames last week, bringing out

volunteers from every fire and rescue company in the county.

Ennis' Gid Brown Hollow residence caught fire last Tuesday around 8:30 a.m. She and her husband, Robert, were at work, and her two kids, ages six and eight, were at school. Ennis said she

got an alert on her phone of a fire in Washington, and realized it was her own address.

"I feel like, probably in any type of loss, you see it, but maybe you're not believing it," Ennis

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'We're at a deficit': Supervisors lament Whitson's absence from government

BY BEN PETERS
Rappahannock News staff

As Hampton Supervisor Keir Whitson's absence from county government continues for more than a month without a clear end in sight, members of the

Rappahannock County Board of Supervisors said the lack of his presence at meetings alters the body dynamic.

Whitson, who was hospitalized after suffering a heart attack on July 28 while visiting his parents in Wisconsin,

is expected to miss another Board of Supervisors meeting on Sept. 7, according to Chair and Wakefield Supervisor Debbie Donehey. He's also been absent from a number of other public meetings, including the Broadband

Authority and Planning Commission, which he chairs.

The current state of Whitson's health is not clear; he has not returned

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Rapp student loan borrowers reflect on debt forgiveness plan

"It's a relief, because who doesn't want a little help now and again?... And how is it getting paid for?" ▶ Page 10



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PHOTOS BY LUKE CHRISTOPHER

Shannon and Robert “Punkin” Ennis with their children, Marissa, 8, and Justin, 6.

“I’m living through the ‘we are Rappahannock’ motto right now’... I know everybody knows Rappahannock is special, but you just really see it in these times of need.”

SHANNON ENNIS

ENNIS

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said. “Each day it almost gets worse, because reality sets in when you wake up in the morning, and it’s not a nightmare. It’s true.”

The fire reignited five times between last Tuesday and Thursday, prompting additional emergency calls to the fire and rescue companies. All that is left of the home is the foundation. The family has been staying in a hotel since last week and is looking for rentals in the county.

Ennis said an investigator found the cause of the fire to be electrical and started in the middle of the home. The family lost everything, Ennis said, but was able to salvage her grandmother’s wedding albums. “Everything we own fits in a milk crate,” she said.

She said that the night before, her kids fell asleep on the couch after shopping for party favors for her daughter’s birthday. Ennis said that if her family had been in the house during the time of the fire, the only way out of the family room — where her kids were sleeping and where the fire started — would have been through a window.

“I think more about all their little things,” Ennis said. “My daughter wanted me to keep every little schoolwork she did ... And I’ll never see that stuff again. They had made me hand prints when they were little. It’s those types of things that hurt the most, because when people



Marissa Ennis finds a burnt purse with an intact matching wallet amongst the debris.

HOW TO HELP

- ▶ The Ennis Household Recovery Fund on GoFundMe: [rappnews.link/rh5](https://www.gofundme.com/rappnews.link/rh5)
- ▶ Donation station at Atlantic Union Bank off U.S. 211
- ▶ Bake sale at Quicke Mart on Sunday, Sept. 4

➔ tell you everything can be replaced, that's not true."

As of now, Ennis said they plan to rebuild their home in Gid Brown Hollow, saying they've lived there for 19 years and love their neighbors. She said one of her biggest concerns will be if insurance, along with money raised by the community, will be enough to cover the costs of rebuilding, especially with the increased cost of building materials and interest rates on loans.

LIVING THE 'WE ARE RAPPAHANNOCK' MOTTO

Members of the Rappahannock County community did not hesitate to show support for the Ennis family soon after the tragedy. "I've cried so much, but it's only been because of the generosity and love from our friends and community," Ennis said.

Kim Williams, Ennis' coworker at the Fauquier County GIS Department, said when she saw Ennis run out of work last week to tend to the emergency, she knew she had to step up and help. Williams organized a fundraiser for the family through GoFundMe shortly after the incident. Since Aug. 24, the fund has raised more than \$29,000, and it continues to grow.

"We wanted to be there so that the community would have a way to help Shannon," Williams said. "She's done so much to touch so many people, and we knew that a lot of people would



The former door to the home's main entrance.

want to reach out and help her too."

The initial fundraising goal was set at \$10,000, but that goal was exceeded in the first 24 hours. More than 200 people have donated to the family, some leaving messages of encouragement and donating as much as \$1,000 at a time.

Rappahannock resident Heather Farmer, Ennis' best friend and Girl Scout co-leader, said she's been working to organize everyone's donations and fielding questions for the family so that they don't receive multiples of items or something they don't need at the moment.

Farmer said she knew there were some gift bags that were lost in the fire that were for their Girl Scouts for selling cookies, and one of the first things she did after hearing the news

was to make sure those items could be replaced.

"So I walked up [to her house after the fire] and I gave her a hug, and the first thing she says is, 'oh, the cookie rewards,'" Farmer said. "So I was able to just take her face in my hands and be like, 'don't worry about it. I've handled that.'"

Ennis said she has been overwhelmed by the support and generosity from members of the community. She said they've received clothes, children's toys and food, along with cash donations and other fundraisers.

"I'm living through the 'we are Rappahannock' motto right now," Ennis said, referring to a slogan coined by Rappahannock County Public Schools. "... It's just people checking on

you and the church offering you home cooked meals, because of course, we haven't had one of them since the fire. I know everybody knows Rappahannock is special, but you just really see it in these times of need."

On Sunday, Sept. 4, resident Christie Atkins will host a bake sale from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Quicke Mart, and all proceeds will go directly to the Ennis family. All donations are welcomed, whether it be monetary or baked goods.

There is a station to collect donations for the Ennis family at Atlantic Union Bank in Rappahannock, located at 7 Bank Rd. in Washington. They will accept monetary and non-monetary donations. Those with questions can contact Angie Shavatt at angela.shavatt@atlanticunionbank.com or 540-987-8384.



Justin Ennis takes a shovel to some of the debris of his former home.