

# THE PERQUIMANS WEEKLY

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"News from Next Door"

35 cents

## Blaze destroys Holiday Island home

• Mother, son lose everything in fire; friends of son skipping school at the home escaped without injury

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Staff Writer

Fire destroyed the Holiday Island home of a single mom and her teenage son last Thursday afternoon. Despite investigations by two law enforcement agencies, the origin of the fire still remains undetermined.

Perquimans Sheriff Eric Tilley said the home of Amy Wilder, located at 121 Ventura Lane, was completely destroyed by fire. A neighbor spotted smoke coming out of the back of the house and notified authorities around 3:25 p.m.

Neither Wilder nor her 14-year-old son were at home at the time of the blaze, but two young friends of her son were inside the house at the time of the fire. The brothers, ages 13 and 15, apparently skipped school that day and stayed in the Wilder home playing video games. The boys had permission from the Wilder son to be in the house that day, Tilley added.

Police said the boys said they were in the living room when they saw smoke coming out of the utility room located in the back of the house. They then ran out the front door. A neighbor saw the boys running out of the house and confronted them, Tilley said.

Wilder said the gas-powered hot water heater and her washer and dryer were in the utility room. The house was also heated by gas, she added.

Both the Perquimans County Sheriff's Department and a fire investigator with the State Bureau of Investigation are investigating the fire.

"At this point, the origin of the fire is still undetermined," Tilley said.

Wilder, who works in Suffolk, said her one story three bedroom house was not insured. However, the community has rallied behind her, donating clothes, linens, towels, pots and pans, dishes, silverware, cleaning supplies and other household items. Her employer has donated groceries as well.

The American Red Cross assisted the



FIREFIGHTERS FROM BETHEL, HERTFORD and Winfall responded to a house fire at Holiday Island last Thursday. Amy Wilder and her son lost everything in the blaze. Two friends of the son managed to get out after seeing fire.

family by placing them in a hotel for three nights before Wilder found a furnished rental trailer just one street over from her home.

"We moved in Sunday," said Wilder. "I was so glad to find something so close to home so that my son could keep his same friends, and go to the same school. I just don't have the words to express how grateful we are for everything that has been donated to us. I just can't thank people enough."

Wilder said the two boys who were inside her home at the time of the fire came to visit her Saturday night at the hotel.

"Their dad brought them and they took my son out to dinner," she said. "I just hugged them and told them I was so glad they got out without being hurt. I'm just so glad they are OK. I asked them if they had learned their lesson about skipping school, and they said they had."

Firefighters from Bethel, Hertford and Winfall battled the blaze. By the time the fire was called in and departments responded, it was too late to save the house or its contents.



FIREFIGHTERS STAND NEAR A gas tank as they work to extinguish the flames that completely consumed a home at Holiday Island last Thursday. The Salvation Army helped victims Amy Wilder and her son, and friends and neighbors have helped her outfit a rental just one street over from her former home.

## Santa sales mixed

• Some local merchants did well during Christmas, others were down

CATHY WILSON  
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The holiday retail season brought a mixture of results for area merchants. While some reported excellent sales, others didn't fare as well.

The Pink Turtle, a new shop that offers everything from fine jewelry to monogrammed handbags, reported a good holiday season, especially last minute sales.

"I think people really discovered our shop this season," said Anita Garrett, associate manager. "Things went pretty well. I think we did most of our Christmas sales at the last minute. We're excited about 2008 when we will introduce a couple more new vendors in the shop."

Planters Ridge reported an excellent season, much better than last year's.

"Sales went very well," said Lindsey Ferrell, garden shop manager. "The Christmas trees looked better than the ones we had last year. We only had five trees left over. I made so many bows, my hands are sore. It was a great Christmas season for us."

Douglas Layden with Layden's Supermarket in Belvidere said this year was a big season for them.

"We sold 500 gift baskets, over 400 hams, and made over 4,000 pounds of country sausage. That's pretty good for an old country business," he said.

Willie Cofield, owner of Hertford Variety, said overall, this year's Christmas retail season was "all right," but not quite as good as last season.

Gay Murray with Tarheel Fireplace agreed.

"As far as the shop is concerned, we stayed busy with construction and remodeling, but sales in the retail store were less than last year's," she said.

Erie Haste with Hertford Hardware said the Christmas retail season doesn't impact his business simply because of the nature of the hardware business.

## Schools are super safe

Three Perquimans County Schools have earned the N.C. Department of Public Instruction's top safety award, the Super Safe School (Triple S) designation, for the 2007-08 year.

The Triple "S" School Award was established by the Department of Public Instruction's School Improvement Division to recognize public schools' exemplary efforts to ensure the safety of students and staff. Schools that are safe for students and staff are a top priority of the State Board of Education. Statistics prove children can't learn and teachers can't teach if they are concerned about their well-being.

Staff and principals from Perquimans Central School, Hertford Grammar School, and Perquimans Middle School will collect the awards on Feb. 7 at the annual Safe Schools Conference to be held at the Koury Convention Center in Greensboro, North Carolina.

The award is given to schools that participate in a voluntary process of assessing safety procedures, incidents of disruption and violence, and school response to safety concerns.

"It is a tremendous amount of work to complete the application process. We are fortunate to have three schools selected. I am proud of each school and each staff member," said Superintendent Dwayne K. Stallings.

Stallings says providing a safe learning environment for children and educators is a priority because he believes high student achievement goes hand-in-hand with a safe learning environment.

To qualify for the Super Safe

School Award, schools must show they follow safety procedures above and beyond those that the state requires. Schools must also report data on student performance, provide copies of student and parent handbooks, and analyze safe schools and crisis management plans.

At the conference, school employees will attend workshops on best practices of schools throughout the state, which can be used to further improve local safety plans.

"The safety plans for each school are constantly being developed and becoming more detailed," says Director of Special Projects Jeanie Umphlett.

The application process for the Triple S Award allows principals and staff to perform an ongoing self-study of the school by voluntarily submitting a portfolio documenting the safety processes in place.

According to PCHS Principal James Bunch, Perquimans High completed the same process as the three other schools in the district. Records indicate that PCHS earned the safety award in 2004, 2005 and 2006.

"The layout of the school and the openness of facility due to ongoing construction certainly present safety concerns which are out of the norm," said Bunch. "As principal, I will continue to be vigilant in the efforts of safety for students and staff regardless of the conditions in which I am faced."

Bunch said, "As I tell students, parents and teachers, 'Pardon the dust as we grow into a state-of-the-art educational facility.'"

## State lifts burn ban

The statewide open burning ban enacted back in October has been temporarily lifted.

State officials lifted the ban last week after recent rains across the state. The rains, however, are not enough to end the drought being felt by most of the state's 100 counties.

According to the North Carolina Drought Management Advisory Council, Perquimans County was elevated from moderate to severe drought conditions this past fall. That condition remains as of Jan. 2.

Officials believe carefully tended open burning is safe now in order to reduce the amount of dry forest debris and cut the potential for larger, more intense and harder-to-control fires later in the year.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources and its Division of Forest Resources will continue weekly monitoring of conditions to determine if the burn ban needs to be reinstated. The ban on open burning could be reinstated if the potential for wildfire activity increases because the state continues to receive below normal rainfall coupled with above average temperatures and increased wildfire activity.

The ban on open burning was imposed Oct. 15 because of dry weather and depleted water resources across the state. The decision to lift the ban comes at the recommendation of the N.C.

Division of Forest Resources, which fights wildfires and regularly measures the factors such as weather and available fuels that play an important role in the likelihood of experiencing dangerous wildfires.

State forestry officials say that if people burn leaves and other vegetative materials, they should take the same precautions they would have if it had not rained because fires can easily escape. Some rules to follow if you burn include:

1) Open burning may include burning leaves, branches and other plant material. It is illegal to burn trash, lumber, tires, newspaper, plastic or other non-vegetative materials.

2) Make sure you have a valid burning permit. You can obtain a burning permit at any NCDNR office or permitting agent or online at [www.dfr.state.nc.us](http://www.dfr.state.nc.us).

3) Follow local laws on debris burning. Some communities allow burning only during specified hours; others forbid it entirely.

4) Check the weather. Don't burn on dry, windy days.

5) Be prepared before burning. Keep fire tools available. You will need a garden hose, a bucket, a steel rake and a shovel for tossing dirt on the fire. Never use kerosene, gasoline, diesel fuel or other flammable liquids to speed burning.

6) Always stay with the fire until it has been extinguished.

### WEEKEND WEATHER

THURSDAY  
HIGH: 63 LOW: 55  
SHOWERS

FRIDAY  
HIGH: 69 LOW: 42  
SCATTERED SHOWERS

SATURDAY  
HIGH: 58 LOW: 34  
AM CLOUDS, PM SUN