

# HOUSE FIRE

between the garage and house and made its way to the attic. Crews arrived on scene and began fire suppression efforts."

Earlier, grandpa and grandma Boeche had been entertaining family for the extended Fourth of July holiday, having one of their daughters and two grandchildren staying the night. After enjoying the Fourth's festivities, they all nestled-in for sleep.

Pickering said, "We know the fire started in the trash barrel. But due to multiple potential causes in the barrel, we can't definitively say—as in a court of law—that one of them had verifiably been the actual cause."

With neither of the two trash barrel combustible culprits—batteries in electronic devices and spent fireworks—identified as the single, actual cause, the fire has been technically ruled "accidental."

EPFD was the lead agency battling the fire, with Deputy Chief of Operations Jason Russ first serving as the Incident

Commander who coordinated the multi-agency response through the mutual aid system, which ultimately brought 12 fire departments on-scene.

"We had 16 vehicles in all," Pickering said, "including an EMS ambulance from our department and one from Janesville."

Russ amplified, "During my response as initial incident commander, I had begun requesting additional resources. With this weekend being a holiday and many on vacation, I knew we might need the additional help. The warm weather also was in my mind."

"We knew we'd need backup for two main reasons," Pickering corroborated. "First, it was 86-degrees outside; hot and humid; and our firefighters were getting pretty beat up. We needed to rotate crews."

The second reason was the size of the fire. We knew we'd need a lot of water, as this was not your typical house fire due to

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the 'fire load.' So, out of the five MABAS levels of assistance, we went to the second alarm to bring in more resources."

After investigating the cause of the fire, the chief "absolutely confirmed" that the fire had begun in the trash barrel. From there the fire crawled along the exterior side of the attached garage and, coming to the soft-fit, its flaming tongues reached into the garage attic and found a major 'fire load' of stored old documents and records.

With the living quarters thus-far unaffected, the fire moved through the attic to above the residence while the garage attic fire simultaneously burned through its floor and torched the two vehicles, snow blower and other combustible items (think, aerosol cans, etc.) below.

At one point, spectators and first-responders heard a steady succession of explosions originating in the flame-drenched garage.

"Since the fire burnt through



Boeche disclosed that every few minutes something else, besides the two cars, exploded in the burning garage.

the attic roof," Pickering explained, "that acted like a chimney, with the fire and heat rising."

"That's why the smoke alarms in the residence didn't go off."

Because of the heroic actions of these very first of the first

responders, all five sleeping people and two pets were saved.

And due to covering Boeche's historical collection with tarps so as to minimize water damage, firefighters were able to protect something rare and valuable.

"We are very fortunate," Boeche said again, having told the same to so many people over the last 14 hours.

"I'm so very thankful to Andy, Travis, the two girls, and everyone else. The firefighters were incredible. And support

Photo by Tristan McGough from neighbors and the community has been great and so appreciated!"

Pickering iterated, "They recognize how fortunate they are. Mark has been overwhelmed by the response of neighbors and the community as a whole."

The chief continued, "It makes you feel good to see that kind of local response, where neighbors and others in your community care about you and your welfare."

"You just feel good about that!" Pickering concluded.

## After fire, confusion over accommodations for family

By Tristan McGough  
Special to the Reporter

The fire disaster at 933 E. Meadow Circle, Edgerton on July 5, 2019, during the early morning hours led to some post-incident confusion as the displaced family sought hotel accommodations.

One of the off-duty officers who first responded to the sleeping family's fiery plight was Andrew Lyga, who became concerned upon learning that the Boeche's wouldn't be allowed to stay at the nearby Quality Inn, 11102 Goede Rd., apparently because they couldn't produce a credit card they themselves owned.

Lyga's Facebook posting on July 5, 2019, at 12:16 p.m. led to a firestorm of social responses, both online and through phone calls and emails that were directed at the Quality Inn itself.

Lyga posted, "During the early morning hours on July 5, 2019, a family came to you looking for a room to stay in until the homeowners insurance company can assist with living arrangements. This family just lost their home to a fire overnight and lost a majority of their belongings including their cellphones and wallets. Another family member of this family attempted to use their personal credit card to purchase a stay until things can be figured out. This individual was not going to stay in the room with them. Due to this you would not allow this family that was in dire need of a place to rest after a traumatizing event such as losing their home to a fire, stay in a room that was going to be bought and paid for by another family member."

That itself would have been enough to arouse community ire; however, Lyga wasn't finished fanning the flames of discontent.

"It is very nice to know that when a local community member needed you the most, you just turned your backs and told them that you could not help them. This family had to seek alternate means to get some sleep. This family lives in the neighborhood less than one mile behind your building. This unwillingness to help a family in need is highly unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Your hotel is without a doubt a big conversation piece in our neighborhood this morning. We had high expectations of your hotel chain, but I don't think any other hotel chain would have done what you just did. Because of this my family will no longer be staying at any of your choice hotels during our travels."

Kenda Selgren Field responded on FB, "Andrew Lyga just to let you know this has been reported to WKOW 27 news!!!! Also reported to Choice hotels headquarters. It has now been reported to multiple news media outlets!!!!"

Harsh judgments and strongly worded condemnations abounded and the firestorm was fast becoming a wild fire amidst social and broadcast media.

Kerry Pople gave what appears to be the universal consensus, saying, "Very sad. Hotel

should have let them stay for free."

Tracy Heitke shared, "Considering the circumstances, they should have given them a free room, or at least a healthy discount! We had damage to our place a few years back, could not stay in our house for a little over a week, and the manager at Comfort Inn and Suites in DeForest gave us a healthy discount on our room. (Only room available was a king suite, so he greatly discounted the room due to the situation!)"

Things seemed to be going badly for QI and through chain-association its sister hotels. Nevertheless, certain posts were more temperate and inquisitive.

Marilyn Peterson said, "Not my experience with Comfort Inns. Got stuck at one in Iowa after Christmas when interstate shut down due to a blizzard. They were very accommodating to all."

And Tara Nelson inquired, "Has there been any word from the owners/corporate in their defense?"

Well, yes, as a matter of fact, there has.

Fagar Patel, who is general manager of the QI at Newville, said, "This disturbs me greatly. We do like to support everyone in our community."

In his defense, he was at a conference for manager training and only learned about the incident Saturday morning, the 6th of July. Upon returning Monday morning, he has been on dam-

age control, along with Assistant Manager Shyam Patel (no relation).

As it turns out, the credit card incident started and ended with a call from an unidentified person. No one at any time came to the Quality Inn and requested a room in person.

According to Shyam, "First, we don't get many calls in the middle of the night requesting a room. Our third-shift agent told them that we did have a room available, but when the caller asked if we'd take a third-party credit card, the agent told them they'd have to fill out a credit card authorization form to verify that the transaction wasn't fraudulent.

"That's something just about every hotel does regarding card verification over the phone."

The joint law enforcement task force on business fraud that reaches from Rockford through Janesville to Madison has been actively warning business owners of prevalent scams, of which third-party credit card fraud over the phone is the biggest. The Patels and their employees had only been following the protocol suggested by police officers.

"Just in July alone," Shyam revealed, "we've had three fraudulent credit card uses."

The assistant manager, who wasn't there at the time of the call, affirmed that had the Boeche's come in, particularly with a fire or police officer, they would have been given a com-

plimentary room.

Fagar re-emphasized, "We always try to help the community. If someone from the Red Cross or fire department would have called or come along, we would have done everything we could for them, like we've done in the past."

In times before, the staff at the Newville QI have helped those displaced; however, in each of those instances either an official, usually from the fire or police department or sometimes from the Red Cross, came to confirm the situation.

Notwithstanding, both Patels acknowledged that had the Boeche's appeared on hotel premises—a relative's credit card would have been quite acceptable, since it would be scanned and not need a 24-hour clearance time, which is only for over the phone transactions.

In the past, when the Red Cross has introduced a distressed family to QI, "we've given them 50 to 60 percent off the regular room price, which their insurance covers anyway," Shyam said.

Fagar exclaimed, "We're not anyone's enemy. We could have been in that situation, too. I would have wanted people to help me, too."

"We want to apologize about all the confusion. If someone would have come to our property and explained the situation, everything would have turned out differently."

"I'm sorry it didn't."



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