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Riverdale house destroyed in fire

BY TEHANI SCHNEIDER • STAFF WRITER • JULY 6, 2010

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Authorities are probing the cause of a pre-dawn fire that gutted a Hillside Avenue home and took more than two hours to extinguish. (STAFF PHOTO/BOB KARP)



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No one was injured in the blaze, which broke out shortly after 4 a.m. and was extinguished by 6:30 a.m. in the residential neighborhood off Route 23, said Riverdale Police Sgt. James MacIntosh. .

The two-story house was occupied by the homeowner's 17-year-old son, who was sleeping in the basement when the blaze broke out, MacIntosh said. The teen awoke and ran to a neighboring house, and the neighbor called 911, MacIntosh said. The family's two dogs also made it out safely, he said.

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Fire destroys Riverdale home

"The son indicated he woke up and found the house full of smoke but was able to get out along with the pets," MacIntosh said. It was immediately unclear if the teen was alerted by a smoke alarm.

The homeowners, who are vacationing in Virginia, were notified of the blaze, MacIntosh said.

"The house was completely destroyed," MacIntosh said, adding only the chimney and "one and a half walls" remain.

The son will stay at a neighbor's house until his parents return. The teen was checked by the Pompton Lakes/Riverdale First Aid Squad for signs of smoke inhalation, but did not appear to be affected.

The cause of the fire remains under investigation by the borough's fire inspector, but may have been

caused by a stove burner that was accidentally left on overnight, police said.

"At this time, it's believed the son may have left the stove on overnight, after he cooked himself something to eat and went to bed," MacIntosh said shortly before 9 a.m.. "They're investigating that as a possible cause."

Approximately 100 firefighters assisted Riverdale at the scene, with neighboring departments from Butler, Kinnelon, Pompton Lakes, West Milford, Bloomingdale, Wanaque and Boonton responding.

Firefighters were hampered in extinguishing the blaze by a gas leak and Public Service Electric & Gas officials were called at the scene.

"The valve wasn't able to be shut down completely, so PSE&G is on scene," MacIntosh said.

Authorities temporarily shut down a lane on Route 23 North to haul a tanker up to the scene since there are no fire hydrants on the mountain, MacIntosh said. Motorists in the area were advised to expect delays as a result of the activity, according to the state Department of Transportation's Web site.

As of 9 a.m., fire crews remained on scene, extinguishing hot spots.

Cooling stations with air conditioned tents and supplies of ice water were provided to prevent firefighters from overheating as temperatures rose into the 90's.

"Luckily, no one has been injured at all," MacIntosh said. "They limited the time the firefighters were out in the heat and the sun."

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