

Town of Port fire sparks investigation

Written by BILL SCHANEN IV
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Authorities search for trio seen on property where blaze damaged building on Jan. 15

Ozaukee County authorities said this week they are searching for three people, possibly juveniles, in connection with a Jan. 15 fire that destroyed part of a replica frontier fort in the Town of Port Washington.

Lt. Rodney Galbraith of the Ozaukee County Sheriff's Department wouldn't comment on specifics of the investigation but said what authorities have learned so far leads them to believe that three people were trespassing on the property, which is east of Highway LL just south of the I-43 overpass, around the time of the fire.

Noting there are no utilities, such as electricity or natural gas, on the property, Galbraith said authorities think the fire was set, although they are not sure whether it was accidentally or intentionally started.

"We believe these people may have information about the fire and may live in the area, know someone in the area or were visiting someone in the area," Galbraith said, adding that the suspects probably walked to and from the property.

The fire was reported at 9:45 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 15, and was put out by the Port Washington Fire Department.

"We're asking anyone with information to contact the sheriff's department," Galbraith said. "That was the night the Packers played (the New York Giants), which may help people remember something they saw that night."

Daniel McFeters, the Fox Point resident who has spent 15 years creating and maintaining what he calls a "private living history facility" on the Town of Port Washington property he rents, estimated the fire caused \$10,000 to \$15,000 in damage and said several valuable antiques were destroyed.

"That's \$10,000 to \$15,000 I don't have," he said.

McFeters' fort is designed to depict life in colonial America and during the height of the Western fur trade. He opens the facility for school tours, he said.

"My love of history is why I've dedicated 15 years of time and money to this project," he said.

McFeters said a log cabin that forms the cornerstone of the fort and part of the great hall were destroyed by the fire.

"I also lost a lot of valuable things in the cabin," he said. "What kills me is the antique desk

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dating to 1836 that is gone.”

McFeters said this isn't the first time there has been trouble on the property. Shortly before the fire, the cabin door and lock were damaged, as if someone tried to break in, he said.

Three years ago, there was a break-in, he said. Among the items stolen were an authentic Cheyenne headdress and homemade stand, sketches of American Indians and fur traders, black powder rifles, a .22 caliber rifle and a Davey Crockett lunch box, McFeters said.

“I intend to rebuild, although the process will be long and slow because this is all coming out of my pocket,” he said.

McFeters said he is offering a \$500 reward for information that leads to the arrest and successful prosecution of the people responsible for the fire.

The Ozaukee County Sheriff's Department Detective Bureau can be reached at 284-8468.