

Investigators probe fatal Ester apartment fire

By BETH IPSSEN

Staff Writer

A body was found in a burned-out Ester apartment Friday morning, Alaska State Troopers said.

But troopers aren't releasing much information about the fire or the person found in the bedroom of a nine-unit apartment building at 3210 Parks Highway.

"Based on the size of the victim they thought it might be a female," said trooper Capt. Greg Tanner. "I know there is a female that lives there that is not accounted for."

Tanner said investigators haven't determined if the fire was accidental or arson.

According to a resident two doors down from the gutted apartment, a man and a woman moved into the burned-out apartment a few months ago. The woman is unaccounted for. Investigators would not release any other information.

At 8 a.m., troopers received a 911 call from a woman reporting a fire at the apartment building located just west of

When firefighters arrived at the building, flames were already shooting out of the first-story apartment.

Gold Hill Liquor & Grocery.

Ester Volunteer Fire Department Chief John Debbaut said when firefighters arrived at the building, flames were already shooting out of the first-story apartment. Debbaut said the fire was confined to the apartment, but two units located directly above sustained smoke damage.

At 8:56 a.m., firefighters told troopers that an unidentified body had been found in the bedroom of the first-story apartment.

The body was sent to the medical examiner's office in Anchorage for identification and to determine a cause of death, Tanner said.

Meanwhile, investigators from both the state crime lab in Anchorage, the

troopers general investigations unit and the state fire marshal in Fairbanks have been combing the burned apartment looking for clues to the origin of the fire or if there's a reason to suspect foul play is involved, Tanner said.

At 6:30 p.m., fire and trooper investigators were still walking in and out of the paper-covered entryway.

Other troopers were posted outside to keep people away from the scene. Vehicles from local fire investigators were parked in front of the older two-story building.

The electricity and heating were temporary cut off, but turned back on at about 4 p.m. Some of the residents will be able to return to their apartment soon, troopers said.

Beate Wilson, who lives two doors down from the charred apartment, didn't waste her time getting back in her apartment, where she lives with three of her four sons and an assortment of pets.

Wilson said she had left early for work Friday, otherwise she would have been out walking her dogs when the fire was discovered.

Instead, a neighbor who lives in the apartment above the burned apartment pounded on the door to wake her boys and their friends who had spent the night and tell them about the fire, she said.

They got two of the dogs out, but had to return later for their three cats, iguana, birds, fish and a guinea pig.

Wilson said she returned home quickly after getting a call at work about the fire, but by then the fire was under control.

"They had the fire trucks all the way up the road," Wilson said. The University Fire Department, Chena-Goldstream Fire & Rescue and American Red Cross

also responded to the fire.

Wilson said she saw another neighbor's dog outside the building wearing an oxygen mask.

Debbaut said the Fairbanks North Star Borough Animal Control was called to take a cat and a dog to a veterinarian for treatment. He didn't know the animals' condition Friday night.

Wilson said she didn't know the man and woman who had moved into the two-bedroom apartment two doors down a few months ago.

Wilson has lived at the complex for two years. The end apartments, such as the one gutted in the fire, used to be a garage area that was converted to apartments, she said.

Even many hours after the fire was put out, the scent of smoke still permeated the main floor of Wilson's apartment. She said the smell was much stronger on the second floor.

"Now I have to go upstairs and open up all the windows," she said.

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Sex offender charged with same crime

By DAN RICE

Staff Writer

Eight years after being convicted of having sexual contact with a minor girl, a 29-year-old Fairbanks man was arrested Friday on allegations he had a sexual relationship with a 15-year-old girl during a two-month period this year.

Stacey R. Lorenz was arrested at about 1 p.m. after police interviewed him at his job at McDonald's on Geist Road, Detective Aaron Ring said.

Lorenz was looked into Fairbanks Correctional Center on one count of second-degree sexual abuse of a minor, but Ring said Lorenz likely will be charged with six counts.

Lorenz is accused of having a sexual relationship with the girl during October and November. Ring said Lorenz met the girl by giving her a ride home from a shopping mall. The sexual acts are alleged to have occurred in the Fairbanks hotel room Lorenz is renting, he said.

Ring said police were alerted to the allegations by the girl's mother.

Second-degree sexual abuse of a minor is a class B felony that is punishable by up to 10 years in prison. A person who is older than 16 can be charged with the crime for having sex with someone who is between the ages of 13 and 15 and at least three years younger than the offender.

Lorenz has been arrested on the charge before. According to court documents, he was indicted in January 1994 on a charge of having intercourse with a girl who was 15 or younger. The original charge was second-degree sexual abuse of a minor, but Lorenz eventually pleaded no contest to third-degree sexual abuse of a minor.

Before he was sentenced on the charge, Lorenz was released on his own promise to appear back in court and given certain conditions to follow, one of which was not to have contact with girls younger than 16.

Lorenz was charged with violating the court order. According to a document prepared by Fairbanks police, Lorenz tried to solicit a 15-year-old girl to have sex with him, and students at

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Catching dinner



Marty Ezell, 18, warms his hands over a bucket fire as, from left in background, Rick Rose and Ezell's parents, Clay and Peggy Ezell, watch their holes as they ice fish at Chena Lakes Thursday afternoon. The group was on its "shakedown" ice fishing trip, the first of the season when they work on remembering everything they need for the day. Using shrimp and eggs, they were well on their way to meeting the quota for a family fish fry with about a dozen trout and arctic char already on the ice. In photo at right, Justin Ard, who recently moved to Fairbanks from Kansas, holds up a freshly caught stocked rainbow trout.



Eric Engman/News-Miner

\$1.6 million in federal aid goes to quake victims

By TOM DELAUNE

For the News-Miner

Federal aid for victims of the 7.9 earthquake that struck Interior Alaska on Nov. 3 has exceeded \$1.6 million, according to the Alaska Division of Emergency Services.

The funds will come from the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Additional federal funding for highway repairs could total more than \$40 million, according to Ralph Swarthout, director of the state Department of Transportation's northern region.

The earthquake, centered about 90 miles southeast of Fairbanks, lasted about 30 seconds. It broke apart highways and rocked rural homes in the initial tremor. To date, the Alaska Earthquake Information Center

Light quake rocks Interior

The Associated Press

FAIRBANKS—A light earthquake shook the Interior Thursday night, but there were no reports of damage or injuries. The Alaska Earthquake Information Center said the magnitude 4.5 quake occurred just after 8 p.m. and was centered 19 miles southeast of Denali Park.

has recorded more than 5,000 aftershocks. The quake was the largest ever recorded in Interior Alaska.

Swarthout said the Federal Highway Administration will pay for most of the repairs but some of the money will come from FEMA. DOT will receive about \$32.5 million to repair Alaska's major roadways such as the Mentasta, Nabesna, Richardson, Denali, Parks and Alaska highways as well as the Northway Road.

The state also will receive about \$11.5 million from FEMA for repairs to the Northway Airport, while smaller amounts will repair routes such as Fielding Lake Road and the airport access road into Eagle.

Swarthout stressed that the road repair figures from FEMA and the FHWA are only preliminary estimates. He said the time frame on the repairs depends on how soon contracts are set.

"We've done enough temporary repairs to get us into the next construction season," Swarthout said.

President Bush declared the situation a disaster on Nov. 8, allowing federal agencies to respond with aid programs.

The U.S. Small Business Administration has approved \$144,200 in low-interest loans to businesses affected by the quake, according to the state. Funds for home repairs and rental aid have totaled \$270,829. Some \$67,755 has been allocated to the replacement of lost heating oil and household items.

Some 292 homes have been inspected so far for federal aid qualification. The registration deadline for disaster assistance is Jan. 17. FEMA's toll free number is (800) 621-FEMA.

Long-lost letter reaches Fort Yukon after 10 years in transit

SNAIL MAIL: Dacho Alexander was working on a fire crew out of Glennallen about 10 years ago when he wrote his mom, Ginny Alexander, in Fort Yukon.

There weren't many fires that summer, which was part of the problem. Dacho told her that he was down to \$5 and since he had to buy his own food, he'd soon be facing a cash flow problem.

A week or so ago, the letter finally reached Fort Yukon. Dacho, an airplane mechanic for Everts Air in Fairbanks, now knows why he never got an answer when he was strapped for cash. He did scrape by that summer, however, and never asked for money again.

The letter arrived 10 years later with a note on the back saying that it had just been found on the

Dermot Cole



floor of a storage building, apparently in an Alaska post office. Someone added six cents postage to the letter to compensate for the postal increase in the years since it was mailed.

GENERAL SPEAKING: The two-page biography of Gregg Renkes, Alaska's new attorney general, which is posted on the state Web site, refers to him a

dozen times as "General Renkes." It may be the formal title, but I don't recall former generals Charlie Cole or Grace Schable putting the term to such heavy use.

A former Washington, D.C., lobbyist and staff member to former Sen. Frank Murkowski, Renkes coordinated Murkowski's 2002 campaign for governor as well as his 1992 and 1998 Senate campaigns. He has just moved to Alaska.

The general's direct experience in Alaska is limited to working in Anchorage while going to law school and serving as a law clerk and magistrate in Palmer after graduating with a law degree from the University of Colorado in 1986.

THE LACK OF Fairbanks

appointments by the Murkowski administration has been the subject of much local debate, speculation and grumbling.

A local Republican had this comment about my Sunday column regarding the U.S. Senate selection: "One thing that you did not bring up is that I and many others thought of his seat as a Fairbanks seat. Frank has pretty much left Fairbanks out of the picture in his administration, which also bothers me."

I WOULD LIKE TO THANK the many people who called or wrote expressing their condolences following the death of my father.

Your kind and considerate comments were greatly appreciated. After I wrote a column about

his life, one reader wrote, "It made me reflect on the relationship I have with my father and the fact that all of our days are numbered. It prompted me to plan a trip to Florida to visit with him while I still have the opportunity."

THE CLOSING LINES of "Charlotte's Web" are: "It is not often that someone comes along who is a true friend and a good writer. Charlotte was both."

The Fairbanks Drama Association on the production of the play based on the novel is delightful for children and their parents. Rebecca Gryder, a sixth-grader at Denali Elementary School, really brings Wilbur the pig to life. The other cast members, most of them young children, also do a great

job. Catch them while you can today at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. and Sunday at 2 p.m. Call 456-PLAY for reservations. Tickets are \$7 for those over 12 and \$5 for those 12 and under.

THE FORECLOSURE SALE on the Polaris Building has been delayed to Jan. 10, perhaps because the original notice had the old courthouse address, not the new one.

It remains to be seen if the building will remain a downtown eyesore. A little less than \$1 million is owed on the property, but it's going to be an expensive proposition to demolish or rehab the downtown monolith.

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