

After fire, Hilltowns offer help

By SEAN REAGAN
Staff Writer

WORTHINGTON — Smoke was still rising from the remains of J.P. and Marian Welch's Patterson Road home Monday when friends, neighbors and local businesses began showing up to help them through the difficult time.

"This is a town that holds together," said the Rev. Douglas Small, pastor of the Worthington Congregational Church. "You'll always see the outpouring of support when these things happen."

The Welches' home burned to the ground Monday in a fast-moving fire despite the efforts of local firefighters. Marian Welch said wax she was melting to make candles caught fire. The only person home, she was able to leave the house safely.

The Welches stayed with a neighbor after the fire. Small said that by the end of the day, they had received two other offers of shelter. "That's just how it happens," Small said.

The Old Creamery in Cummington and Chesterfield General Store sent food and supplies to firefighters and the Welch family, along with promises of additional assistance if necessary. The Welches have two children.

"It makes it all worth it when you can do something for someone in need," said Alice Cozzolino, who co-owns the Old Creamery. "The smallest gesture can be so profound."

J.P. Welch has sold his hand-made brooms at the Old Creamery and Marian Welch has sold her hand-made soaps there. Cozzolino said that the Old Creamery sent over salads, sandwiches, cookies, candy bars, soda and coffee.

"We gave her a big hug when we got there," said Cozzolino. "It was a sweet moment, to be able to say that life is going to be OK."

Steve Magargal, who co-owns Liston's Bar and Grill in Worthington, also sent food. "I cooked whatever I could and sent it over for them," he said. "I've known them for years," added Magargal. "I coached their son Lionel in soccer. They were wonderful parents to deal with."

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Paul Dimond, who owns the Chesterfield General Store, said any crisis in the Hilltowns brings out the best in friends and neighbors alike. "I sent word to the family that if they needed anything, that if we could help them in anyway that we would," he said. "It's just the right thing to do."

Small said the immediate needs are financial. Individuals who wanted to make donations to the Welches may do so through the Worthington Congregational Church, particularly if they want to do so anonymously. Small said donors should mail checks to the church and earmark them "Welch fire fund" to ensure that all the moneys are directed to the family.

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