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NEWS

N. Shore kindness amazes fire victims

Furniture, clothing, money and dog treats donated by strangers

James Weldon
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A North Vancouver couple whose home was destroyed by fire says the response from friends, family and even strangers to his plight has been overwhelming, and has put him on the road to getting his life back together.

Jeremy Davis and Danya Fowler, who lost most of their possessions in a Dec. 18 fire at their 26th Street basement apartment, have been flooded with calls from people wanting to help them out.

The couple has received offers of furniture, clothing, money - even dog treats - since the North Shore News ran their story Dec. 20.

"It's been amazing," said Davis. "Friends, family, strangers, everyone has been unbelievably helpful."

Perhaps most stunning are the donations from those they have never met, he said.

"(There's been) lots of crying," said Davis. "These are people I don't even know."

Davis was home alone with his dog, Ozwald, at 309 East 26th St. just before 9 a.m. on the day of the fire, when he woke to the sound of crackling. After listening for some time, he got up to investigate, and found the storage area outside his bathroom engulfed in flames.

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By the time Davis had found Oswald and made his way to the apartment's only exit - a back door in the room next to the bathroom - fire was already pouring across the stairway outside. Oswald refused to go near it, so Davis heaved the dog through the flames to safety and then sprinted through after him.

The fire did not burn everything - it destroyed less than a quarter of the home - but much of what the couple owned was ruined by smoke and water. Appliances, electronic equipment, winter gear, memorabilia, most of their clothing and many of the Christmas presents they had bought for friends and family were left unusable. Davis made it out of the house with only his dog, his boxer shorts and his car keys.

The couple had no content insurance, and Davis, an afternoon supervisor at Ace Courier Services in Burnaby, had little in the way of savings, having been laid off from his previous job some months before. His mother, who is disabled and on social assistance, was not in a position to help, either.

"We're starting from new," he said. "Socks, deodorant, soap, shampoo, everything you have that you don't think of."

Although the article published two days later contained no request for aid, the North Shore News quickly received about a dozen calls from readers offering to help. People have come forward with everything from clothing to couches to mattresses and box springs.

The generosity has been stunning, said Davis.

Several local dog care companies, including Dogtime, Fetch, and A Spot for Spot Dog Daycare Ltd. pulled together donations of money, a dog bed, a day in day care, and other items for Oswald and his owners. Another donor gave the couple a cheque for \$1,000 dollars, and still another gave \$600.

Davis' only complaint is that some of the donations were made anonymously.

"I'm trying to get thank-you cards together, and it's hard without people's names," he said.

The couple's softball team and other friends also rallied to support them, and Davis's boss sent a letter to Ace Courier's regional branches looking for help. The response was significant, he said.

Davis and Fowler managed to salvage a few things from the ruins of their home. Some of the presents they had bought for others were still OK, their plastic wrappers having protected them from smoke and water. Some family photos had made it through also, and a small assortment of objects - such as a food dehydrator that had been locked away and Davis' guitar - survived as well.

The biggest obstacle now for the couple is finding a place to live, said Davis.

An affordable apartment that will take Ozwald has proven difficult to locate. That means they have not been able to accept many of the offers of furniture right away because Davis and Fowler have nowhere to put them.

Still, Davis is keeping a positive attitude.

"We made it out. We're safe," he said. "It's been a little bit of a setback, but we'll get through it. I guess it's a fresh start."

At the request of donors, an account has been set up by TD Canada Trust to take donations: account number 6377612, transit number 9640.

A Spot for Spot Dog Daycare at 259 East First St. has also been accepting gifts for the couple, as has Michelle Sevigny of Dogtime, at 604-813-9221.

published on 12/29/2006

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