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Four alarm fire pulls community together

by Nancy C. Butler

Community was more than a word this morning in Orofino as fire fighters from six departments, ambulance, law enforcement, governments and volunteers worked together to help a neighbor, the McLaughlins, after their logging shop caught fire.

A drizzling rain did not deter people from offering help with any task that was at hand whether it was to move files from the office or provide moral support as the family watched.



McLaughlins Logging Shop is a short distance west of the Orofino Bridge on the shores of the Clearwater River. The bridge is in the center left and Orofino Builders Supply is in the bottom right.

No one was at the shop or office when the fire started. Smoke coming from the eaves was noticed by Rory Wilson's 15-year-old son. Rory went to the shop and finding no one but saw fire around the wood stove by the east wall. He grabbed a fire extinguisher from the rack and thought he had the fire out, but it reignited twice more before he found the smoke too heavy to return and noticed flames in the ceiling. By that time, fire fighters had arrived.

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To the left is a photo of the wood stove that is believed to be the source of the fire. to the right are the three fire extinguishers that were just not quite enough to put out the blaze.

Anyone with a view of the scene, scanner or emergency radio knew pretty quickly that it was an unusual and serious situation when about 10:15 - 10:30 first Orofino Fire Department was toned out with smoke showing from the eaves of the shop about. Very shortly, that was followed by a second alarm asking for Sunnyside Rural Fire Department and then Twin Ridge Rural Fire Department and Evergreen to come and assist. It was not long until the call went out for Upper Fords Creek Rural Fire Department and Grangemont Rural Fire Department to join the ranks. While Orofino had most of the truck they needed, manpower was the critical piece.



Fire fighters from the six departments are assisted in suiting up and getting air bottles secured.

OFD Assistant Chief Clay Hesson said about 36 fire fighters from the 6 departments were on scene. Fortunately, the departments have mutual aid agreements and often train together.

Clearwater County Ambulance Service was on scene to provide medical care and assistance to fire fighters and others as needed. Part of that was to give weary fire fighters a place to rest out

of the rain and catch a drink of water, though the breaks were brief. Fortunately, there were no serious injuries. Law enforcement assisted with traffic and crowd control.

In what Hesson said was a first for an "entry tool", a locked shop door on the west side was pulled open by a Clearwater County Road Department road grader when it would not respond to other methods. Access was the biggest challenge. Most of the fire was in the attic and with the metal roof it was hard to get to. The fire was contained about noon. Mop up took several more hours.



A road grade help provide the power to pull open this locked shop door so fire fighters can access the west side of the shop better.

The shop has concrete walls, so the major damage to the structure was to the roof and contents. Hesson said he thought most of the tools and presses would be okay when they were cleaned. A backhoe did sustain damage. The office, which is a separate building, was not damaged, he said. The cedar facing on the outside did not sustain as much damage as might be expected because of the concrete walls. The shop was insured, according to the family.



Collapsed roofing materials are on this backhoe that was damaged in the fire.

According to the Mary Ann McLaughlin, a lot of their equipment is in the woods, on their shop truck and some in their Pierce shop. More of the equipment will be moved there until they decide what to do with the damaged building. She said they were able to get their main computer CPU and essential records out of the office.

McLaughlins have been in the logging business for three generations starting with Bruce and Marguerite's fathers. Now Mick and Mary Ann are running the business. Among the mementos brought out of the office were an original photo of Marguerite's father logging and some horse logging photos. The family rented the shop for a time before purchasing it from Dick Midstokke in December 1986, Mary Ann said. Molly, Mick and Mary Ann's daughter put on the cedar facing a couple of years ago before leaving for college.

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McLaughlin Shop Fire...



Flames are visible from the on the left side of the roof as smoke boils up.

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Vents in the eaves are opened up to make it easier to reach the fire.



After the second shop door was open, fire fighters work to extinguish the from both doorways and

into the attic.



Fire fighters work on the east side of the building to extinguish flames in the attic.



Fire fighters spray water on the roof from the back side of the structure. The Orfino Bridge can be seen on the right side of the photo.

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McLaughlin Shop Fire...

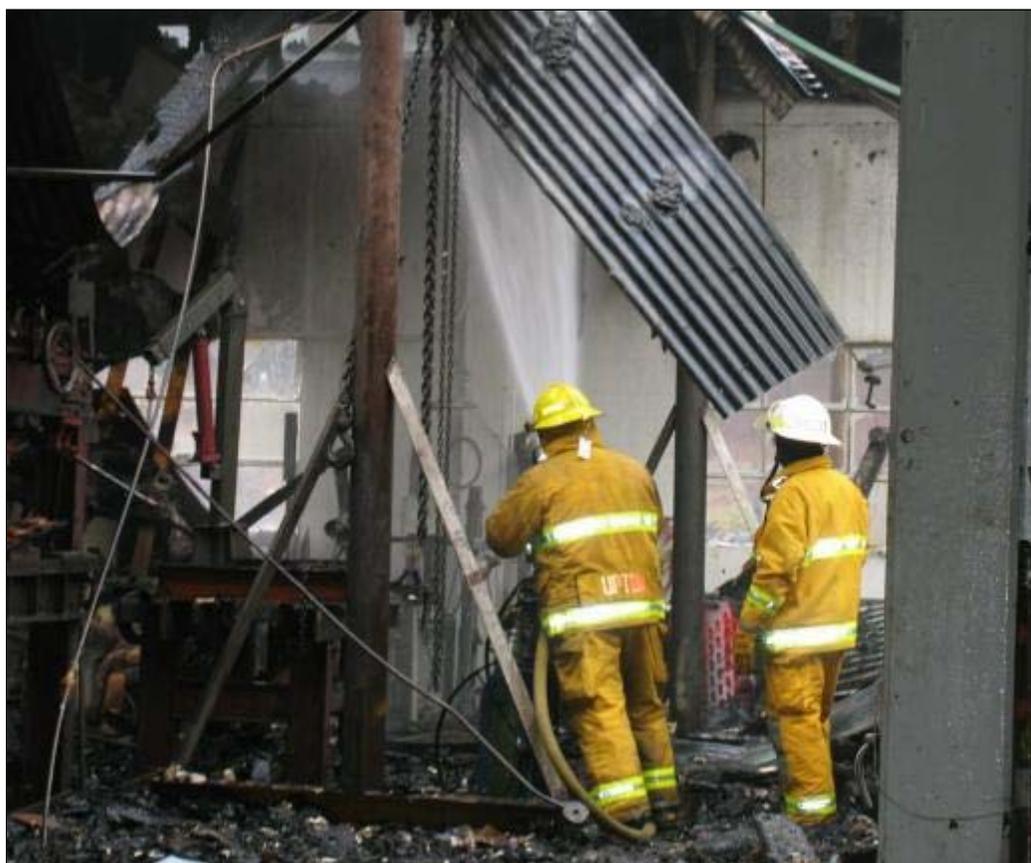


A fire fighter works with a pole to pull debris from the burned ceiling to make sure no flames or hot spots are left. Other fire fighters check in other locations for hot spots.

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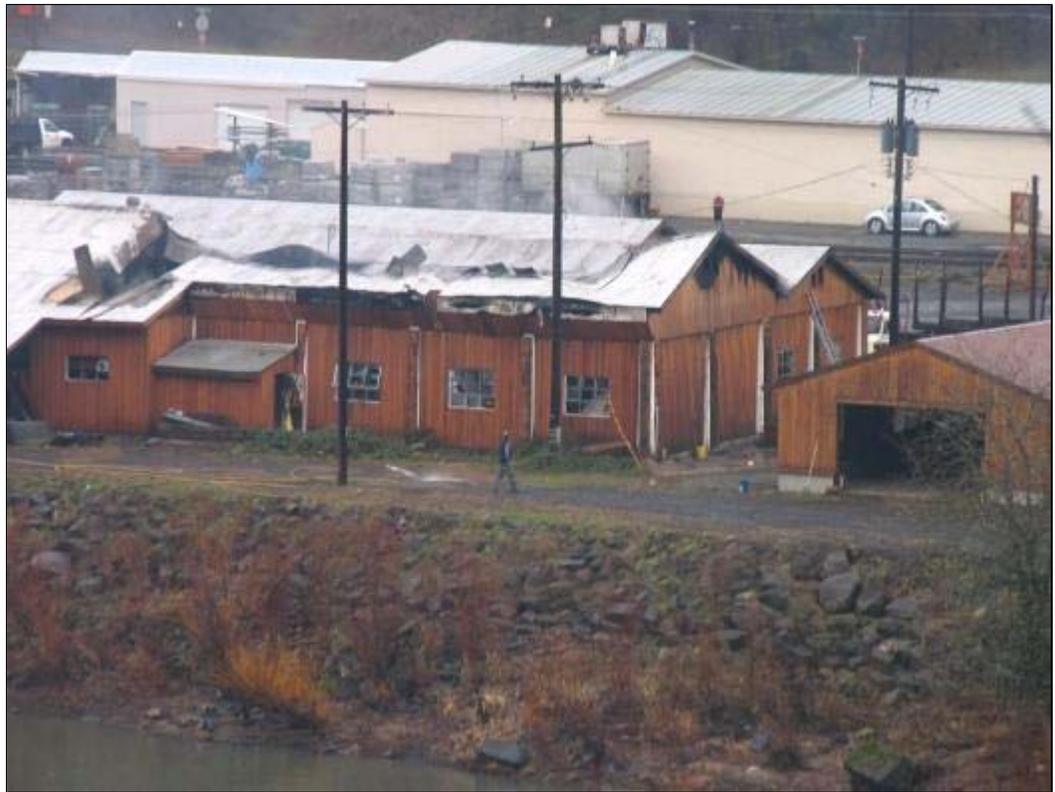
Notice attic and roofing materials strewn on the floor.



Fire fighters spray water into the attic and check for remaining hot spots.



A view of the damage from the back of the shop shows collapsed portions of the roof.



Roof damage is even more evident from this photo taken from Laudenschill hill. Orofino Builders Supply is in the background of the photo.