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Washburn tavern has new owners, **A3**

No-no!

Washburn pitcher hurls perfect game, **A1**



Ashland Daily Press



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> **Richard R. Steel** - Washburn

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MAILING LABEL ONLY

Bayfield fire victims struggle to find homes

BY RICK OLIVO
rolivo@ashlanddailypress.net

Betty Kerr was taking a nap shortly after noon in her first-floor apartment April 16 when someone came pounding on her door, frantically yelling to get her attention.

"Betty, there's smoke coming out of the window!" the voice yelled.

The warning came from David Duffy, a friend of Kerr's who happened to be passing by when he saw the smoke.

"I stepped out on the porch and looked around the corner, and there was smoke, so I went back inside and yelled for my son to grab the fire extinguisher, because it looked pretty small at that point," she said.

Kerr, 62, went to notify a neighbor, Bob Marshall, and then she heard the window at the rear of the building explode, and a quick look told everyone that the fire at 239 Manypenny Ave. was too much for a small extinguisher to cope with. Fortunately, Kerr's son, Mark Gokee, 42, had not had time to approach the smoking window.

"You could see that there was no putting it out that way," Kerr said. "I'm just glad he wasn't standing in front of it."

While Gokee, who works for the Red Cliff Tribe, had the presence of mind to rescue his laptop and footwear, Kerr was forced out of the home wearing nothing more than a tank top and stretch pants. Fortunately, she had a pair of shoes in her car, but what she was wearing and what she had in her car is all she escaped with.

"I took a picture less than five minutes after I woke up, and the building was already in flames," she said. "We were just lucky it wasn't midnight, because there would have been lives lost for sure."

All 15 residents of the six



Betty Kerr took this photo of her burning home just five minutes after she was awakened from a nap and fled the apartment building. Kerr and the rest of the 15 people who lived at the six-unit apartment lost everything in the blaze and most still are seeking places to live. (Contributed photo)

apartments at what was known as the Schultz Building escaped with their lives, but all were left homeless with most everything they owned burned with the building.

Bayfield Fire Chief Jeff Boutin said Thursday that insurance company investigators continued to examine the fire scene and a cause has not been determined.

Meanwhile, residents have spent the past two weeks relying upon the kindness of the community but also facing a stark reality: There may be nowhere for them to go.

Bayfield's housing market is notoriously tight, all the more so because the city of about 500 year-round residents is headed into the busy tourist season, when

just about every available apartment is snapped up by tourists.

And those tourists depend upon the very services that many people who lived in the apartment building provide at local restaurants and businesses.

Gokee and her son have been able to stay with a sister, but others have been less fortunate.

Becky Tochalauski, who works at the Manypenny Bistro just a block away from the site of the apartment building, was shopping at Walmart in Ashland when she got a text message from her daughter.

"By the time I got back, the entire building had already collapsed," she said.

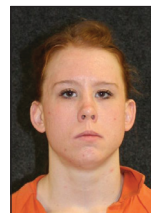
SEE FIRE PAGE A5

Ashland woman charged in Wednesday house fire

BY PETER J. WASSON
pwasson@ashlanddailypress.net

A 23-year-old Ashland woman was arrested on preliminary charges of arson in connection with a fire that destroyed a Fifth Street home Wednesday.

Courtney Byerhof, 204 1/2 Main St. W. Apt. 213, faces charges of arson, bail jumping and criminal damage to property in connection with the house fire and one other fire, according to court records.



Byerhof

She was arrested after Ashland Police Lt. Scott Morland, who was investigating the blaze, spotted her on security camera footage near the home immediately before and after the fire, records said.

Firefighters were called to the home at 812 Fifth St. W. just before 1:30 a.m. Wednesday. When they arrived, they found flames consuming the front of the home and stretching to the roof. Two occupants escaped the burning building when its smoke alarms sounded, but both were treated for smoke inhalation suffered while fleeing.

Byerhof, whose name also is spelled Byerhoff in court records, apparently has a previous relationship with one of the occupants. She was out on bond on multiple domestic abuse charges with orders that she stay at least three blocks away from the home that burned.

When questioned by Morland and another officer Wednesday, Byerhof admitted she set the house afire, records said.

"Byerhof stated that she did not intend to hurt anyone," court records said. "Byerhof admitted that she had sprayed de-icer chemical spray on the inside porch area and lighting that with matches. Byerhof stated that she had left the scene after starting the fire, only to return to discover that there were big flames coming from the porch area."

Byerhof told police she lingered for a while to watch the fire then returned home, reports said. Police later searched her apartment and found the can of de-icing chemical, reports said.

Byerhof also faces charges in another incident connected with the home that burned. When interviewed, "she admitted to attempting to light (one resident's) car on fire and slashed the tires during an incident that occurred No. 17, 2021 at 812 Fifth St. W.," the report said.

SEE FIRE PAGE A5

Mellen student who raised siblings wins \$10K scholarship

BY TOM STANKARD,
tstankard@ashlanddailypress.net

To say Mellen High School senior Chloe Schutte didn't have a typical childhood is probably an understatement.

Rather than playing with her friends, she was often taking care of siblings who have relied upon her for the past 10 years or so while their mom was being treated for cancer, sometimes as far away as Boston and for a week at a time.

"She is doing better and is present now. The medicine she takes has the symptoms down, but it's still hard," Chloe said.

Raising kids as a kid herself left her little time to spare for studying and schoolwork, and her grades suffered.



Chloe Schutte (right) credits Mellen social studies teacher Sheryl Koosmann with helping her improve her grades while Chloe was caring for siblings as her mother received years of cancer treatment. Her grades and perseverance recently won Chloe a \$10,000 scholarship that she will use to study in the medical field. (Tom Stankard/staff photo)

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