

Merry Christmas!

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Cat bed ignited by heater blamed for apartment fire

By MARY BROWNFIELD

AN ELECTRIC wall heater ignited a piece of plywood early Wednesday morning, almost destroying an apartment in a Pacific Grove triplex, according to Monterey Fire Division Chief Jim Gunter.

Thanks to three police officers — including PGPD Chief Darius Engles — who heard about the fire on their scanners, the residents were already outside when the fire engines arrived.

“The caller reported to dispatch, ‘There’s fire everywhere!’ and then the line went dead,” said Engles, who arrived at the complex at Forest and Gibson shortly after Sgt. Jeff Fenton and officer Angelo DiMarco.

The fire was in the front upstairs unit.

“Around the back, you could hear it roaring and popping,” as the windows blew out, said Engles, who was working patrol from 4 to 7 a.m. due to short staffing and officers out sick. “We started banging on doors and got everyone out.”

Within moments, some 18 firefighters were attacking the blaze, according to assistant chief Andrew Miller (who was Pacific Grove Fire Chief until PGFD became part of

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A sunroom that was home to four cats is now covered with plywood and blue tarps after a wall heater ignited a plywood cat bed.



PHOTO/CHRIS COUNTS

Caretaker accused of assaulting firefighter during battle for observatory

■ Also called a hero, he says charges are phony

By CHRIS COUNTS

THE CARETAKER of a Carmel Valley observatory is facing criminal charges for allegedly interfering with firefighters during last summer’s Big Sur wildfires.

But Ivan Eberle, a noted wildlife photographer, says he was just trying to defend the observatory, which is also his home, and that the charges he’s facing are payback for his criticism of the way firefighters acted as the flames marched up Chews Ridge.

Eberle received a commendation and a \$1,000 gift from the Monterey Institute for Research in Astronomy for his “heroic actions” that day, which were credited with helping to save the observatory from the Big Sur wildfires.

Yet five days after receiving the commendation and gift, Eberle was charged with two misdemeanors by the Monterey Sheriff’s Office. The crimes the Monterey Sheriff’s Office believes Eberle committed allegedly were carried out July 12, the same day as his “heroic actions.”

“He battered a firefighter and interfered with a firefighting crew,” said Sgt. Dennis English.

Eberle is charged with violating sec-

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Ivan Eberle, charged with battery on a firefighter last summer, took numerous images of activity around his observatory home as flames approached. (Above) A group of firefighting inmates pose for a souvenir photograph July 12 as the fire moves toward them. (Left) At night, the fire put on a spectacular — and frightening — show.

PHOTOS/COURTESY IVAN EBERLE

Deputies search for brazen, tattooed bank robber

By MARY BROWNFIELD

A COLORFUL tattoo is one of the distinctive marks that might lead to the capture of the man who held Citibank tellers at gunpoint late Monday afternoon and escaped with thousands of dollars, according to Monterey

County Sheriff’s Cmdr. Mike Richards.

The lone suspect was wearing a black ski mask, sunglasses and possibly a hat when he walked through the front door of the bank on Carmel Rancho Boulevard at 4 p.m. Dec. 15.

“He said, ‘Everyone, this is a robbery. Give me your money,’” Richards said. Armed with a dark-colored semiautomatic handgun, the robber “put the manager on the floor with his hands up, and focused on the two tellers, who handed him money.” No customers were in the building, and no one was hurt.

Without touching anything in the bank, he shoved the cash into a small dark bag he brought with him, left through the door he had entered and headed around the back of the building to the parking lot. Within 30 seconds of his departure, a teller dialed 911.

Witnesses described the robber as being about 5-foot-11-inches tall, of medium build, and in his 40s or 50s.

“He did have a colorful tattoo on his left arm above the wrist,” said Richards, who hopes someone will recognize that unusual feature and tip off police. “Another witness described it as being red,” but unfortunately, no one could say what the tattoo depicts.

The bank robbery was the third in three weeks in Monterey County, and investigators suspect they might be related, according to Richards.

On Nov. 26, a man of similar age, skin color and build walked into Washington Mutual Bank on Berwick Drive near Mid Valley Center and robbed it with a dark-colored semiautomatic handgun, the sheriff’s office reported. He wore a fake beard instead of a mask, and he didn’t use the same

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Anonymous donor gives \$10,000 for children’s toys

By KELLY NIX

A MAN who hopes his generosity will spark others to give to the needy has donated \$10,000 to a Carmel woman who for 15 years has made sure that children have toys during the holiday season.

The anonymous donor sent the large check to Carmel resident June Larson, who every year raises money to donate to the Salvation Army for the Toys for Tots program.

The check, which Larson said is by far the largest she’s received, will go toward buying lots of toys for needy children.

“There are many children who see all this stuff on TV about Santa Claus,” Larson said, “and they jump out of bed and they

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City tries again to OK low-cost housing

By MARY BROWNFIELD

WITH THE California Coastal Commission staff’s gutting of a Carmel ordinance meant to encourage 100 percent affordable housing projects, city planners and officials from the nonprofit Carmel Foundation met this week to figure out Plan B for the proposed low-cost senior housing project at Trevvett Court.

The ordinance, which languished with coastal commission staff for more than a year, was created to allow exceptions to zoning rules on height, setbacks, density and floor area for projects solely consisting of low-income housing. But coastal planners worried the new law might lead to projects that would ruin the town’s character, so they recommended commission-

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