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Fergus fire - Firefighters and paramedics treat a 65-year-old woman rescued from a house fire on Union Street in Fergus on Jan. 25. The woman was taken to hospital in serious condition. The fire is being treated as suspicious. *photo by Olivia Rutt*

## Suspicious fire on Union Street sends two to hospital

by Olivia Rutt

FERGUS - A 65-year-old woman and a firefighter were taken to hospital after a house fire on Union Street in Fergus that is being treated as suspicious.

Called in at around 4pm on Jan. 25, the fire resulted in the closure of Union Street, from Hillside Drive to St. David Street, as five trucks and firefighters worked to battle the blaze.

The injured woman was located in the home and is in serious condition, said Wellington County OPP officials.

Centre Wellington Fire Chief Brad Patton said on Jan. 26 the firefighter was treated for heat exhaustion and is back on duty.

The Fergus and Elora stations were called to the property, lo-

cated directly across from Groves Memorial Community Hospital.

Patton said when firefighters arrived at the scene they saw heavy smoke coming from the building. Firefighters "entered the building and started extinguishing multiple fires and searching for people," said Patton. "We found one person inside on the second floor."

Patton said firefighters performed extremely well.

"It was a difficult call, they were professional, they did a very tough rescue under very poor conditions," he said.

The fire is being investigated by the Ontario Fire Marshal's office, Wellington County OPP and West Region OPP Forensic Identification Services.

## House fire near Conestogo Lake linked to power outage

by Patrick Raftis

MAPLETON - No one was injured but a family of seven lost their home and all their belongings in a house fire on the Fourth Line, just east of Conestogo Lake, on Jan. 20.

The fire was reported by a neighbour who saw a red glow around 8:15pm, said Mapleton Fire Chief Rick Richardson, who was the first one on the scene. He added the house was engulfed in flames when he arrived.

"There were flames coming out three sides in the upstairs and three sides in the downstairs so basically all the exposed sides of the house had flames coming out, including the basement, so it was fully-involved for sure."

"The guy who called it in was there with his pickup truck. He had towed the vehicles, trucks that were at the house, back from the house."

But he did tell me that there was a family that lived in there, but it wasn't confirmed that they weren't there."

A tense few minutes later, Richardson said firefighters learned the family - two parents and their five young children - was safe.

"A neighbor contacted them for us and they were on their way here together, they were all in the van together so nobody was in the house," said Richardson.

He noted firefighters, including Mapleton's Drayton and Moorefield stations and a tanker crew from Floradale, then focused on preventing the fire from spreading to a nearby pig barn and vehicles.

"As more water became available, we put more water on the house to douse it down," he said, adding firefighters were on the

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## Mapleton welcomes Syrian family

by Jaime Myslik

DRAYTON - Drayton Heights Public School welcomed its first Syrian refugee students last week.

On Jan. 18, six children from the Al Jasem family began classes at the school in kindergarten and Grades 2, 3, 6, 7 and 8.

"It really is an absolute highlight," said Drayton Heights principal Jeff Crawford.

"For the first week you'd see them gaining in their confidence and pretty seamlessly, the students in the school already were great at welcoming them. The staff were fabulous at planning; as you go around the school some of the staff had set up signs that show the English and the Arabic."

Congregations in the Mapleton area that are part of the Markham Waterloo Mennonite Conference sponsored the Al Jasem family of 11 to come to Canada through a United Nations program.

"They look at the sponsorship group and ... you can request fam-

ily size and we said we're okay with doing a large family because we've got a big group and large families they have a harder time finding sponsors for, because of the added responsibility and accommodations and so on," explained Matt Frey, a member of the sponsorship group and liaison with Drayton Heights.

The Al Jasem family arrived in Canada on Dec. 30 from a refugee camp in Lebanon, where they lived for more than three years after fleeing Syria, Frey explained.

The sponsorship group provided the family with a house in Drayton, helped father Khalil Al Jasem enroll in English as a second language classes in Waterloo, and arranged for transportation to and from the course.

Frey also took the seven eldest Al Jasem children to Drayton Heights the week before six of them officially began classes.

"They literally bounced from the van into the school and their eyes were huge and they were all excited," Crawford said.

ford said. "It was ... a highlight from a professional standpoint just watching their excitement about coming to school."

"It was like Tigger, from *Winnie the Pooh*, the way they kind of bounced in and they were like that for the whole time, they just were going from room to room."

Frey said the students had gone to a UNICEF school in Lebanon, however, "it was not as they would have known school before; limited what they would have had for resources and stuff like that."

In preparation for the youngsters' arrival Drayton Heights acquired six Google Nexus 7 tablets from the Upper Grand District School Board that allows English-speaking staff and students to speak or write into Google Translate, convert their words to Arabic and communicate with the Al Jasem family.

"As we went around the school I could actually say to them, 'okay this *Continued on page 37*

## MP Michael Chong ponders leadership bid, hopes for renewal of party

by Mike Robinson

OTTAWA - Will Wellington-Halton Hills MP Michael Chong run for the leadership of the Conservative Party?

Only time will tell.

In a Jan. 25 telephone interview with the *Wellington Advertiser*, Chong said "I've not yet made a decision." He hopes to decide in the coming weeks.

Currently, Chong is talking to people across the country, "getting their views on where they think the party and the country should go - and once I'm done gathering their views and advice in the coming weeks, I will make a decision."

Chong has served as MP since 2004 and won his seat in the most recent election with 50.9% of the vote.

"After the election on Oct. 19, several hundred people contacted me and encouraged me to seek the leadership," Chong said.

"In early December, I decided to take their suggestion seriously and decided to talk to Conservatives and Canadians to gather information in order to make a decision."



MICHAEL CHONG

Chong said he is hearing "a sense of excitement and opportunity within the party ... that this is a chance for us to renew the party, to debate policies and to come forward with new ideas to present

to Canadians in the 2019 election."

He said "there is a real sense of optimism and hope, because it is the first time in 10 years that we've had a chance to, as part of a leadership race, renew the party. I'm excited about playing a role in the renewal of the party, whether it is as a leadership candidate or in another way."

For Chong, the leadership race is just one aspect of renewing the Conservative Party.

Chong welcomed the idea of other high-profile Conservatives, such as Peter MacKay, Jason Kenney and Lisa Raitt, vying for the leadership. No can-

didate has officially confirmed a bid to enter the race, with a new leader slated to be chosen in 2017.

"It is in Canada's interests to have two strong national parties, each holding the other in check and in balance. When that happens, our system works the best," noted Chong.

In the short term, Chong said "we have the responsibility to renew the Conservative Party and hold the current government accountable."

However, he added, "Ultimately it is important to renew the party to present Canadians with an alternative in the next election."

Chong believes the party needs to "keep a focus on the Canadians we serve and I see this as an opportunity to do that."

He hopes the party can broaden its appeal to those who have yet to vote.

He believes delaying the leadership decision until May 27, 2017 is a good thing because it will allow for a broad field of candidates to present themselves for contention.

"This will broaden the appeal of the party and allow us to hold a vig-

orous debate over policy and to select the best leader to lead us into the next election," he said.

Chong, who introduced the Reform Act that was approved by the Senate in June, said the act will not have a direct impact on the leadership vote.

"Rona Ambrose, our interim leader, was elected under the Reform Act rules. She was elected by secret ballot at the first caucus meeting after the general election. We've never done it that way previously," he said.

Before then, the tradition was for the outgoing leader to, based on consultations with caucus, appoint an interim leader, explained Chong.

Seven candidates put their names forward to be interim leader, so there was a secret ballot with those names.

The caucus voted for Ambrose, he said, "But the vote for the leadership of the party will continue as they have always existed for our party," Chong said.

As for his family, Chong said "Carrie and our three boys William, Alistair and Cameron are going to be part of this decision."

"The five of us have not yet made a decision, but we've talked to the boys that 'Dad is currently talking to people and getting advice.'"

When the time comes to make a decision in the coming weeks, "all five of us will sit down and make a decision together," Chong stated.

"It's a big commitment, not just for me, but the family - so it should be a family decision."

Since the Oct. 19 election, Chong said a number of local constituents were among those who encouraged him to seek the leadership.

"I've always believed that my first job, whether I was in cabinet, on a parliamentary committee or whether I seek the leadership of the Conservative Party, my first job as Member of Parliament is to represent the people of Wellington-Halton Hills," Chong said.

"[The views of local constituents] are always first and foremost in my mind when I make any decision. The fact is that dozens of constituents contacted me and encouraged me to seek the leadership, encouraged me to take this very seriously."