



PHOTO BY TRISH MCGEE

CHESTERTOWN — Deputy State Fire Marshal Brad Childress talks to Tony Hurley and Cpl. Bert Piasecki of the Chestertown Police Department, Sunday morning, after fire destroyed Hurley's circa-1925 home at 221 Mount Vernon Ave. A passerby reported the fire shortly before 6 a.m. No one was home at the time.

Investigators determine Chestertown house fire began in porch soffit

By TRISH MCGEE

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CHESTERTOWN — A nearly century-old house in the 200-block of Mount Vernon Avenue and most of its contents were destroyed by fire Sunday morning.

The Office of the Maryland State Fire Marshal determined that the fire was accidental and originated in the exterior front porch soffit.

The occupant had been doing home improvements with a heat gun the day before, Deputy State Fire Marshal Brad Childress said.

No one was home when a passerby reported a fire on the roof at 221 Mount Vernon at 5:49 a.m. Sunday.

Volunteer firefighters battled the fire for about two and a half hours before bringing it under control and were on the scene for more than four hours.

Several firefighters were evaluated at the scene for heat exhaustion but were not transported to the hospital, according to a post on the Chestertown Volunteer Fire Company's Facebook page.

Chestertown was the primary responding fire department. About 50 firefighters answered the alarm.

Kent County EMS and Kent-Queen Anne's Rescue Squad also responded.

Childress was notified at 6:15 a.m., and was on the scene about an hour later.

The two-story wood frame

home is owned by Tony Hurley of Chestertown, according to the Maryland Department of Assessments and Taxation. The house was built circa 1925.

Heavy fire was showing from the first floor porch and the first and second floors when firefighters arrived, according to the CVFC Facebook post.

The house was built using balloon framing, a very common form of construction from the 1880s to the 1930s.

"Basically, with balloon construction, there is open space in the walls. If there's a fire in the walls, it goes directly to the attic within minutes," Childress said in a telephone interview Monday.

The fire had breached the attic prior to firefighters' arrival, according to the Facebook post.

Firefighters were able to gain access to the attic through a narrow opening, and "were immediately confronted by heat and dense smoke. By working aggressively, they were able to get a handle on the fire in the attic," according to the CVFC's Facebook post.

First arriving crews also were tasked with knocking down the fire on the first and second floors.

By mid-afternoon Sunday, windows and doorways on the first floor had been boarded up and fire-damaged furniture and other belongings were neatly grouped together in the yard.

K9 unit leads police to Millington burglary suspect hiding in barn

By **ABBY WARGO**
Student Intern

MILLINGTON — Citing the seriousness of the charges, a district court judge on Friday denied bail for the Delaware man accused of burglarizing a Millington home.

Judge John E. Nunn III also determined that Robert James Scott Jr., 31, of Harrington was a danger to the public.

Scott was apprehended Wednesday, May 29 hiding in a barn in Millington, according to court records. A police K9 unit tracked Scott to the barn in the 300-block of Hazel Lane after he allegedly fled out of a third-story window of an apartment building in the 200-block of Sassafras Street.

He initially was held without bail on charges that include burglary, theft and illegal possession of a firearm.

Friday afternoon's bail review was held via video conference. Scott was seated in a chair in the detention center, with a pair of crutches propped up against a table.

In the courtroom were Scott's attorney Basil Wad-

kovsky and prosecutor Chloe Campbell.

Wadkovsky asked that Scott be released on unsecured bond. Scott told the court that he had worked on and off over the last three years for a roofing company.

Campbell argued against release. She described Scott as "high risk" and said he has a history of failing to appear in court and probation violations.

Scott also has an active case in Queen Anne's County, according to online court records. On May 17 he was issued a summons charging him with fraud and theft, \$1,500 to less than \$25,000.

His preliminary hearing in that case is June 26.

In Kent County, Scott faces 10 charges, including two counts of felony burglary and one count of felony theft, \$1,500 to less than \$25,000.

His preliminary hearing here is June 24 in the District Court for Kent County. At that time a judge will determine if there is probable cause to believe that Scott committed the offenses.

Sgt. Stuart M. Lodge of the Kent County Sheriff's Office is heading the investigation.

According to a sheriff's office news release and court records, Scott allegedly burglarized a home in the 100-block of Sassafras Street on Tuesday afternoon, May 28. Items reported taken included a Glock 9mm semi-automatic handgun, jewelry and prescription medication.

The doors to the house were closed, but not locked, according to court records. The handgun was locked in a safe with the key hidden, police reported.

The sheriff's office estimated the total value of the items taken as \$3,500.

Video surveillance from a nearby building showed a man subsequently identified as Scott carrying the Glock pistol in a case in the 100-block of Sassafras Street.

The deputies who caught the case, Deputy Jordan Proudfoot and Sgt. Sean Maloney, developed information that a man matching the suspect's description had been seen "hanging around" in the 200-block of Sassafras Street but they did not have a name.

The following day, Sgt. Lodge began a neighborhood

canvass in an attempt to identify the man.

Sgt. Lodge learned that the suspect had been staying in a third-floor apartment at 201 Sassafras St.

Police tracked the suspect to a barn at 397 Hazel Lane. He entered the barn through a hole in the wall, according to court records.

The man was identified by fingerprints as Scott. The sheriff's office had a bench warrant for him for failure to appear in court on traffic charges.

When police searched the apartment at 201 Sassafras St., they located several hypodermic needles, nine wax folds containing a mixture of suspected heroin and fentanyl, and 10 pills that were later identified as acetaminophen and hydrocodone, according to court records. It is believed that the pills were taken the day before during the burglary.

According to court records, Scott was convicted of felony forgery in Delaware in 2016. The conviction prohibits him from possessing a firearm and from transporting, wearing or carrying a handgun.

Coyotes on Eastern Shore are nothing new

By **KAYLA RIVAS**
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EASTON — A reader recently contacted *The Star Democrat* with concerns after spotting a coyote in Oxford.

The nocturnal creatures have called Maryland home "for quite some time," with the first documentation in the state in 1972, according to Rick Walls, Department of Natural Resources Regional Wildlife Response manager and Wildlife & Heritage Service biologist.

Maryland and Delaware have the distinction of being the last two states in the contiguous United States to be colonized by coyotes, according to DNR.

Though DNR does not survey coyotes for population statistics, Walls said the animals are fairly common in this area. He said there is a common misconception that coyotes are brand new here, and coyote sightings are usu-



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

A coyote runs through a field in Maryland in this photo courtesy of the Department of Natural Resources.

ally novel and generate a lot of interest.

"It is definitely a possibility that coyotes are anywhere in Talbot County," Walls said. "... They are not any more dangerous than foxes or bobcats, found on the western Shore."

Walls said it is not of coyotes' nature to instinctively harm humans, as they would much rather keep away from people. In fact, there has never been a report of a coyote harming a person in the

state of Maryland, according to Walls.

Livestock aren't as fortunate however, with sheep and chickens often bearing the brunt of the blow. Coyotes are in turn the subject of trapping and hunting, Walls said.

Coyotes could be lured to humans by food, however, and Walls said unusually friendly coyotes or nuisances with any wildlife across the state can be reported to DNR at 877-463-6497.

Upon encountering a coyote, Walls advises making lots of noise to harass the animal to get it to move on. Coyotes sometimes take small dogs and cats, and while Walls said there is no documented confirmation of such in Maryland, he advised keeping pets indoors at night.

According to DNR, an average adult coyote weighs between 30 to 40 pounds, with some individuals approaching 60 pounds. They possess typical canine features and generally resemble a small German shepherd dog. They have large erect ears, an elongated sharp muzzle and a long bushy tail.

Overall pelt coloration tends to be brown or buff interspersed with mottled gray or black. The chin, throat, chest and stomach are usually a lighter shade of brown or cream. The lower frontal portion of the legs may display black stockings and the tail has a black tip. Non-typical color phases occur infrequently.

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