

Grand Valley man rescues elderly neighbour from house fire]



Written By **James Matthews**

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

After a hero rescues a sleeping man from a burning home, you know what he does?

The hero makes a round of coffees for the arriving emergency service personnel and then he goes back to watching television, of course.

Grand Valley resident Al Mackie was watching television in his living room on March 2. It was something before midnight, judging by the time a 911 call was received from Mackie's phone.

"I could see flickering on the driveway," he said. "I thought it was fire or ambulance on his driveway."

His Gier Street neighbour is elderly and has some health issues, so it was reasonable to expect such cause for flickering lights in the night's stillness.

"When I get to the door, there's a four-foot flame shooting out the roof," he said.

Mackie shouted to his wife to call 911, but she wasn't anywhere near a phone.

?So I got back to my phone and out the door and called 911 quicker than she could,? he said.

Mackie provided the address and the 911 dispatcher asked him if there was anybody inside the house.

?I said yeah,? he said. ?Should I go in??

Mackie was told to stay out of the house but to make as much noise as he could outside, the thinking being anybody inside would be roused from their sleep.

He honked the horn of his car that was parked in the driveway. Mackie's driveway is side-by-side to his neighbour's.

The car horn was ineffective so Mackie and his wife tried to see into the house through windows, tried to ascertain the situation. They were banging on the side of the burning house. They tried to figure out anything else that could be done to alert the man inside, he said.

?I said screw this and I kicked in the door,? he said. ?I yelled for him and he kind of answered weakly from the bedroom. Had he not answered I'm not sure I would've gone in.

?But, once he answered, I was kind of locked in. I had to go in.?

Mackie said he dodged flames that were spreading through the kitchen, growing in intensity, and made his way to a bedroom door and his neighbour's voice.

?He was not very steady on his feet,? Mackie said. ?He was up out of bed but kind of just standing there. Couldn't see much between the smoke and darkness.

?I grabbed his walker, spun him around, sat him on his walker, and dragged him out backwards.?

An ambulance from Dufferin Paramedic Service was pulling up to the house as Mackie got the walker to the door. A paramedic jumped out and went to them.

?Then they got him on a stretcher and were gone pretty quickly,? he said. ?I guess they had him on oxygen and were gone pretty quick.?

Police and firefighters from Grand Valley and Orangeville responded to the blaze and the elderly man was taken to the hospital with serious injuries, according to a press release from Dufferin OPP.

?I made them some coffee and went back and watched TV,? Mackie said.

In the press release about the fire, police said the elderly man is lucky to be alive, and they credited ?the heroic actions of a neighbour? who rescued the elderly resident from the home.

The Ontario Fire Marshall has deemed the fire non-suspicious.

Mackie and the neighbour's son walked through the house days after the fire. He said one of the elements on the kitchen stove was heavily damaged and a pot was burned through.

Mackie said he was a tow truck driver for 20 years on Ontario's often harried highways. So he's seen a thing or two in his time. He's

seen the results of accident scene heroics, the magnitude of such actions seldom thought about until afterwards.

?I can't even explain it,? he said. ?You don't think; you just do. I couldn't live with myself if I hadn't tried to do something.?

His colleagues at Miedemas Auto Sales where Mackie is a mechanic threw him a pizza party to recognize his heroics. Indeed, such selflessness in a cynical world should be rewarded if for nothing else than for its rarity.

?The guys at work made a big deal about it for me ... and I appreciated that,? he said. ?But I'm really not ... You talk about cynical people and stuff. I can't even imagine being that way.?