

Hot ashes blamed for fire

By ANNE M. AMATO
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SHELTON — An early-morning fire Tuesday destroyed a garage and two cars at Cayer Circle home.

Two occupants and a dog were inside the home at the time of the 12:15 a.m. blaze but escaped unharmed, according to Fire Marshal Jim Tortora.

No firefighters were injured battling the blaze, he added.

He said the fire was caused by ashes from a fireplace that had been discarded improperly, and then rekindled.

"Someone put the hot ashes into a garbage can next to the house," he said. "When firefighters arrived, they found the garage fully involved."

He said two vehicles were destroyed in the fire, including a small pickup truck. A third vehicle, parked in the driveway, was damaged by the heat, he said.

Tortora said the fire was under control in about 20 minutes. Damage was estimated at \$200,000.

Firefighters kept the blaze from spreading into the house, he said.

"They saved the main struc-

ture," he said. "It was a good stop, given the weather."

Tortora said the homeowners are on vacation, and that their 23-year-old daughter and a friend were home when the fire broke out.

About 40 firefighters from the Huntington, Echo Hose and White Hills fire companies fought the blaze at the two-story home, located off Ripton Road in the Huntington section of the city

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Woman, daughter saved from blaze by pet dog

By **AARON LEO**
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STRATFORD — A dog saved a woman and her 5-year-old daughter from a fire ignited by ashes discarded by a neighbor at their Barnum Avenue apartment building.

"She let me know there was a fire going on and kept on nudging me," Diane Scriver said Monday about her dog's wake-up call Friday night. "Once I opened the door, I realized there was a horrible, terrible fire."

She credited her German shepherd and pit bull mixed breed, "Poothy," with saving her and her daughter, Erica DeMatteo.

Scriver suffered burns on her hands, and her clothes caught fire after she returned to her second-floor apartment to rescue two cats. She decided to seek medical treatment Monday.

"I ended up catching on fire myself and having to roll around in the snow to get the fire off me," she said.

She saved one cat, Thomas O'Malley, but lost a kitten in the blaze.

Scriver is a former Fairfield animal control officer.

The American Red Cross found temporary shelter for Scriver and her daughter at a local hotel.

The cause of the fire at 1757 Barnum Ave. was ruled accidental by Deputy Fire Marshal Thomas Velky, who estimated damage at \$110,000.

"The tenant on the first floor had emptied some ashes from a fireplace into a bag and put them on [a couch on] the back porch and didn't realize there were hot embers," Velky said.

"Until the couch heated up, no one realized it was smoldering away," he said.

Velky identified the first-floor tenant as the town dog warden, Mike Griffin. He could not be reached for comment Monday.

"We've had a bunch of fires over the years" caused by improperly stored ashes, Velky said.

He said ashes should be put in a metal container away from a dwelling.

Aaron Leo, who covers regional issues, can be reached at 330-6222.