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Arson suspected in barn fire

By Charles Mattox
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A fire in the early evening of April 7 on East Union Road destroyed a barn and everything inside.

Investigators believe an arsonist may have started the fire.

"We were having a meeting at the fire department when the call came in," said Nicholas County Fire Chief Mark Hughes. "We arrived at the scene within approximately two minutes of receiving the call. The barn belonged to Mrs. Gene Smoot. There is no electricity in the barn and we spoke to a witness who drove by the barn 15 minutes prior to the fire. We are working with Kentucky State Police Arson Investigator Curtis Combs."

According to Hughes, 12 volunteer firefighters

battled the inferno. "There was some farm machinery and between 200 and 300 bales of hay stored inside the barn," Hughes said. "It was a total loss."

According to Hughes, the machinery in the barn belonged to Darrell "Cookie" Meyers.

The fire was intense and completely destroyed the barn and all the contents within only minutes.

Area sources say two loud noises were heard just before the fire started.

Kentucky State Police Arson Investigator Curtis Combs continue to lead the investigation into the blaze. Combs told The Mercury that his investigation continues and he encourages anyone with any information to contact the Dry Ridge Post of Kentucky State Police at 859-428-1212



Photo by Ginger Lyons

Nicholas County firefighters battled a barn fire April 7, on East Union Road. Firefighters were able to prevent the inferno from spreading and investigators believe the fire was deliberately started.

Whirls pleads guilty

By Charles Mattox
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A Nicholas man entered pleas to theft, and amended drug theft charges in Nicholas Circuit Court April 6 as his April 9 jury trial loomed.

Thomas Whirl, 25, and his attorney Jennifer Wittmeyer, appeared before Circuit Judge, Honorable Robert McGinniss, and entered a guilty plea to one count of theft by unlawful taking, more than \$500.

Whirl was also originally

charged with a second charge of theft of a controlled substance, more than \$500; but that charge was amended to theft of a controlled substance, less than \$500.

Whirl was arrested by Kentucky State Police Trooper Dennis Mabry on Nov. 15, 2008, for allegedly removing cash and medications from a safe belonging to a residence on Dogleg Road.

A Nicholas County Grand Jury later indicted Whirl on charges of theft and theft of a controlled substance.

Formal sentencing for Whirl has been scheduled

for May 4 following a pre-sentence investigation.

Assistant Commonwealth Attorney Michael Love signed a plea agreement with Whirl and Wittmeyer and recommended a five year sentence for both counts to run concurrent (at the same time) as one another.

Whirl may be sentenced to the full five years, a partial sentence or have his sentence probated by Judge McGinniss who will make his determination following a close examination of the pre-sentence investigation.

Stewart pleads guilty

By Charles Mattox
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Jordan Stewart, 19, of Carlisle, entered a plea of guilty to the charge of criminal trespassing, third degree, in Nicholas District Court April 7. Stewart was one of four young adults allegedly involved in a series of events, which occurred March 18, when a "prank" resulted in the total destruction of a home owned by Dreams Griffith.

Stewart was allegedly one of the three young men who placed a firework device on the Griffith property.

Garrett Young, 18, of Mt. Olivet, another of the three young men in the group, allegedly picked up the firework after it failed to ignite, and placed the firework on the Griffith porch and ignited it. The home burned to the ground approximately four hours after the incident and investigators believe one of the firework projectiles lodged in the Griffith attic before smoldering and

catching fire much later.

Stewart entered his plea of guilty to criminal trespassing, third degree, before Nicholas District Judge, Honorable Jay Delaney Dolaney Finch Stewart \$250 and ordered him to perform 1,000 hours of community service to be performed on the property of Dreams Griffith. This order was made in agreement with Griffith.

Young is scheduled to return to Nicholas District Court for a preliminary hearing April 22.

Poe leaving Nicholas for St. Pat

By Charles Mattox
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Nicholas County High School Interim Principal Anne Poe, who has acted in that capacity since the termination of former NCHS Principal Joe Orzen, who was terminated two months ago, will be leaving the Nicholas County School System at the end of this academic year.

She will be returning to her Mayville alma mater of St. Pat, where she has accepted a job as that school's principal for next year.

"My decision to leave Nicholas County High School has nothing to do with any events that have occurred this year," Poe said. "Leaving Nicholas County Schools is one of the hardest decisions I've ever had to make. I've really struggled with this."

Poe said the decision was made after deep thought and the fact that she was "returning home."

"I live only a block from St. Pat," she said. "My mother graduated from St. Pat. I there were five of us kids who all graduated from St. Pat."

Poe was asked if the move was based on any financial decisions or if benefits were better.

"That wasn't part of the equation around my decision to leave," she said.

Poe spoke of the passion Nicholas Countians have for education. A passion she said she has only rarely seen in more than three decades of her career in education.

"Nicholas County has real people. The students are real. Some schools that I have been in, well, the students won't even look you in the eye. They will simply stare at the ground when you speak to them. But in Nicholas County the students will look you in the eyes. They speak to you with respect."

Poe was assigned to the Nicholas County School Sys-

tem in 1999 as part of the state's Highly Skilled Educator Program.

She exited the program after one year, which is the length an individual educator can remain in the program, and was asked to return to Nicholas County Schools in 2002 as Curriculum Director.

"I thought that was such an honor to be asked to return," Poe said.

Poe became Assistant Principal at the Nicholas County High School in 2006, and is acting in part as the interim principal. She will stay at the school until June 30.

"I'll be giving 110 percent up until my last day here," she said.

Poe said she would be part of the school's site-based council that will hire a new principal. The site-based council is composed of three teachers, two parents and the principal.

Poe spoke about her general philosophy of teaching

and being an educator.

"Teaching can't just be a job," she said. "It has to be a passion. It's all about caring. If you don't have that, then you don't have anything."

When asked about the status of the teachers at Nicholas County School, Poe said, "I believe the teachers have stepped up to the plate and are hitting home runs."

She also commented briefly on her predecessor Joe Orzen.

"It was a great honor for me to work with Joe Orzen," she said. "And I will always have a special place in my heart for Nicholas County."

Superintendent of Nicholas County Schools Greg Reid complimented Poe on her time at NCHS.

"She did a great job and I know this is a great opportunity for her to return home. She is great professional and I wish her the best."



Photo by Charles Mattox

Nicholas County High School Interim Principal Anne Poe will be leaving her position to return to her alma mater St. Pat after this year.

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