

4 firefighters injured, family dog dies in Gold Pyramid House fire, officials say



The balloon construction of the famous Gold Pyramid House in Wadsworth allowed a fire to race to the top of the structure on July 17, 2018, fire officials said. (Joe Shuman / News-Sun)

By **Frank Abderholden**
News-Sun

JULY 18, 2018, 1:20 PM

There was significant damage to the Gold Pyramid House in Wadsworth after a [fire late Tuesday afternoon](#), but a review Wednesday found that the south section of the house and its contents were relatively preserved, according to officials.

One of the family dogs died in the fire, which started on the exterior of the north side, where painters were scapping and grinding off old paint, using bucket-lifts to work on the second and third floor area, according Battalion Chief Bob Heraver of the Gurnee Fire Department.

Four firefighters sustained minor injuries that were treated at Advocate Condell Medical Center in Libertyville after they returned to the firehouse. Two had possible smoke inhalation, another had a knee injury and a fourth had a shoulder injury, Heraver said.

An automated alarm from the home alerted the fire department around 4 p.m., and at about the same time, workers on the scene called 911 to report the fire.

“There were reports of an elderly person trapped, but construction workers were able to get him out, and he was OK,” Heraver said, adding that hospitalization was not required.

The unusual home is a 17,000-square-foot, six-story structure surrounded by a moat that has a replica of King Tut's tomb on premises. The building featured balloon construction, “where there is a void space between the exterior and interior wall, going from the foundation to the top of the structure,” Heraver explained.

Once the fire got into that space, it was able to race up the inside. This led to the blaze being classified as a mutual-aid box alarm, which brought more personnel and specialized equipment to the scene.

“We knew there was going to be a lot of work in the overhaul,” Heraver said, which occurs after the fire when firefighters tear off drywall and roofing material trying to make sure the fire is completely out and there are no embers that can rekindle.

Heraver added a nearby body of water was a blessing for firefighters because there are no hydrants in the area. They were able to use pumper trucks to take advantage of all the water.

“That worked out great,” he said.

The Gold Pyramid House was built in 1977 by Jim and Linda Onan as a private residence, and includes an enormous statue of Ramses II — 55 feet tall and weighing 200 tons — standing guard at the entrance. Even the three-car garage is shaped like pyramids.

James Onan Jr., 56, said Wednesday that his father was the man pulled from the home by construction workers. He added that he didn't know what his family would do with the damaged pyramid, saying “this was built 40 years ago. You would do it differently today.”

The house had still been open to the public on Sundays for fundraisers and tours, he added, with the grounds including an outside tent, bar and bathrooms.

Onan added that the family also bottled water from a well in the middle of the house to capture the pyramid energy.

“When we had the water tested, it had so many minerals that it could be labeled mineral water,” he said, adding they began bottling the water and selling it three years ago, using a machine at one of the family warehouses.

On Wednesday, the Onans were making arrangements for taking the artifacts and memorabilia out of the home, like a director's chair from the movie “Ten Commandments” and some gold pieces.

“There's a bunch of stuff,” he said.

Gold plating was taken off the structure years ago because of complaints that it was too shiny, but they were thinking of trying to bring that back until the fire struck.

Onan said he tried to shake hands with every firefighter there Tuesday afternoon, “but I think I missed a couple.”

“I’ve never seen so many fire trucks in my life. And those guys were unbelievable, the teamwork they showed,” he said.

Onan was also grateful for the workers who got his father out of the house.

“At least mom and dad were all right. She still has one dog,” he said.

“We need to sit down and think about what we want to do now. It’s become a struggle,” he added. “I know what my dad would say — ‘Everything happens for the best.’ I want him to explain to me how this is best.”

fabderholden@tribpub.com

Twitter @abderholden

MORE COVERAGE

[Fire damages the Gold Pyramid House in Wadsworth »](#)

Copyright © 2018, Lake County News-Sun

This article is related to: [Fires](#)