

# The DALLAS POST

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## Family saves photos, mementos from house fire

Fund has been set up at Citizens Bank to aid Dixon family.

By REBECCA BRIA  
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Five-year-old Jessica Dixon was devastated that her teddy bear was destroyed when her Dallas home burned down.

The toy, called Teddy Bear, was given to Jessica when she was born by her grandmother, Nancy Krasniak, 62. A redhead, Jessica loves the bear because it has the same color hair as she does.

Teddy Bear is now back with Jessica, thanks to the kindness of Michelle Strickland, a friend of 34-year-old Cathy Dixon. Strickland had the stuffed animal dry cleaned to remove smoke damage.

Strickland met Dixon in 2007 when her daughter, Sydney, was in kindergarten with Dixon's older daughter, Samantha. The girls also cheered together for the Dallas Junior Mounts youth football team.

The Dixon family home at 59 Gypsy Lane in Dallas Township caught fire the morning of Tuesday, June 2. Cathy Dixon, her daughters, Jessica, and 6-year-old Hunter, as well as her mother, Nancy, were all home at the time. Lewis Krasniak, 65, Sonny Dixon, 38, and Samantha Dixon, 8, were not home.

Nancy alerted Cathy to the fire and took the children out of the house. When Cathy ran out of the house, she witnessed flames about 8-feet high coming from the couch. Rusty, the family's Sheltie, was tied up outside. Cathy put him in her car and

moved the car away from the house.

Within minutes, Cathy could hear windows popping inside the house. Before long, the one-story house was a total loss.

That was especially devastating to Sonny and Cathy, both formerly of Luzerne, who built the home 10 years ago. Sonny is a roofer and Cathy is a stay-at-home mom.

"The two of us actually built it together nail by nail," Cathy said. "It took us a year. We would come up after work at night and on the weekends. That part of it was hard to swallow."

Almost everything in the house was destroyed in the fire except for a few family photos and the contents of three boxes. The boxes contained gifts from each child's first birthday party. Cathy asked friends and family to bring something to the parties that they would want her children to open in 18 years.

"That's the stuff that matters," Cathy said. "Anything else, who cares?"

The family stayed in a hotel for a week until moving into a temporary home directly across the street from the damaged home on Gypsy Lane. The Dixons are renting the home from their neighbor, George Frazer, who took the house off the real estate market until the family can rebuild. The fire-damaged home was insured and the family plans to rebuild as soon as possible.

Cathy says her family is dealing with the fire well, admitting it is easier now that they are in a

house. She believes the children are handling the situation well because they are back in their neighborhood.

"Now that we're in the house across the street, I think it's nice because they're familiar with their surroundings and they could still go in the yard and play on their swing set," she said of her children.

Cathy is amazed at the generosity her family has received from the community, talking about how they have been helped by many people in the Back Mountain, especially Dallas Elementary School, where her two older children attend school. The school donated money and gift cards to the Dixons.

Dallas High School students and faculty from the school's nursery school program also donated books and toys to the Dixon children. Jessica just graduated from the program and her siblings previously attended the nursery school.

"I've always said where we live, I always thought the school was fantastic," Cathy said. "But now it makes it that much more wonderful. You know you're in a community where you know if you need help with something, there are so many people to help you."

Financial and emotional support also came from various other people and organizations in the form of money, clothes, toys and even cooked meals. A benefit fund for the family has been set up at Citizens Bank.

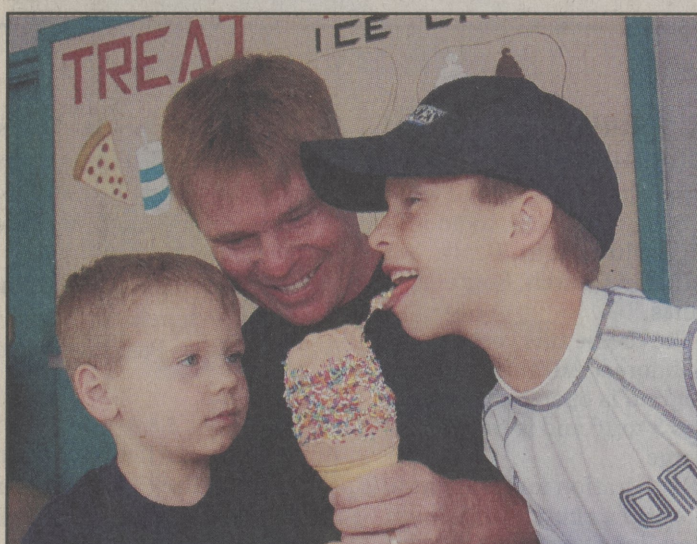
"Our family is grateful for all of the support we've received throughout the community," Cathy said. "We're definitely going to pay it forward."



FRED ADAMS/ FOR THE DALLAS POST

Members of the Dixon family are coping with the loss of their house due to a recent fire. From left, first row, are Sammy, 8; and Jessica, 5. Second row, Hunter, 6; Rusty, the family Collie; Cathy and Sonny. Third row, are Nancy and Lewis Krasniak, Cathy Dixon's parents.

### CELEBRATING FATHER'S DAY



CHARLOTTE BARTIZEK/ FOR THE DALLAS POST

Bob Coslett, of Dallas, like fathers across the country, is celebrating Father's Day today, June 21. Coslett is shown here with his sons, Ethan and Mason, enjoying ice-cream at Treat Pizza and Ice-Cream on the Dallas Highway. Father's Day is a day honoring fathers, celebrated on the third Sunday of June in the United States and on various other days in many places around the world. It complements Mother's Day, the celebration honoring mothers.

## LL grad's curiosity leads to possible career

By REBECCA BRIA  
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FOR MORE PHOTOS ...

To view additional photos of Lake-Lehman School District's 2009 commencement ceremonies, please turn to page 6.

Eric Bella remembers being curious about the culm banks he saw as a child while on hikes with his dad, Paul.

Bella's inquisitive nature toward coal mining is what led him to become an enthusiast on the subject by the time he was a teenager.

The 18-year-old from Shavertown graduated on June 12 from Lake-Lehman Junior/Senior High School. Bella spent much of his high school years studying about mines and volunteering for preservation groups. He was awarded the 2009 Lake-Lehman High School Citizenship Award and the 2009 Lake Silkworth Lions Club Service Award for his efforts in coal mining.

"I find it absolutely amazing that probably nine out of 10 people in this valley worked in a mine and now it's gone," Bella said.

Bella's enthusiasm for coal

mines heightened after his grandmother, Phyllis Bella, told him that her father, Edmund Kruszewski, mined coal on his belly and later drove a mine train in the area. His father also gave him a mining helmet and light that he found as a child when he played in old mines.

Bella started by studying the Huber Breaker and then joined the Anthracite Living History Group. At age 15, he became co-director of the group, which gives presentations, complete with local artifacts.

Last summer, Bella was the youngest speaker at the Abandoned Mine Reclamation Conference in State College. He spoke on the work the Anthracite Living History Group is doing to create a park at the Avondale Mine fire site off Route 11 in Plymouth. The 1869 disaster killed 110 peo-

ple.

For his senior completion project, Bella worked toward making the park at the Avondale Mine site a reality. He put in 100 hours of community service, cutting down poison ivy at the site and helped apply for funding. Bella says the group has received \$9,000 in grant money from the state and \$500 from the Eastern Pennsylvania Coalition for Abandoned Mine Reclamation for the project.

Bella is a member of the Eastern Pennsylvania Coalition for Abandoned Mine Reclamation, the Huber Breaker Preservation Society and the Luzerne County Historical Society. He also belongs to the Underground Miners Group which restores abandoned mining equipment. The

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CHARLOTTE BARTIZEK/ FOR THE DALLAS POST  
Eric Bella is happy to be a Lake-Lehman graduate.

## Ground broken for new Dallas High School; construction will start Wednesday

By REBECCA BRIA  
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Dallas School District officials broke ground Tuesday evening for the new district high school.

Administrators, school board members, school design committee members and students spoke about the new school and held shovels in the cool weather and limited sunshine as they dug into the ground.

Superintendent Frank Galicki told the crowd he became assistant principal of Dallas High School in 1982 and had to deal with a number of problems with the building over the years, including blown up generators, a leaky roof and explosions in the

band room.

"It's a beautiful building," Galicki said. "It's time for a change."

The cost of the new high school project is expected to be about \$42.75 million. The school is being constructed behind the current high school and is being built to accommodate 1,200 students with core areas that can accommodate 1,400 students since growth is expected to continue in the Back Mountain.

The school will be built in the area of the current practice football field and will be parallel to Mountaineer Stadium. A blue storage facility behind the current high school will be demolished and the existing high school will also be destroyed once the new school opens.

The new high school is scheduled to open in time for the beginning of the 2011-12 school year.

Dallas School Board President Karen Kyle, a certified pub-

lic accountant, said that, when she was elected to the board four years ago, she told the district it could not afford a new school and would have to renovate the old one.

Kyle briefly spoke of the journey to making the new school a reality and fought back tears as she acknowledged the many students, some who have died, who walked the halls of the current high school.

Rick LeBlanc, a project manager from Crabtree Rohrbaugh

& Associates, the architect for the construction project, said construction is expected to begin on Wednesday. LeBlanc says road work will begin at the front of the site this summer as well as the construction of a new maintenance building at the far side of Mountaineer Stadium.

"I'm standing in the lobby of the new high school," LeBlanc said with laughter as he stood on grass. "Come back in a cou-

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