

No fatalities in early morning blaze

Written by Lauren Ohnesorge and Dave Blanks
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A residential fire in Banner Elk, first thought to have claimed lives early this morning, proved non-fatal.

The house was off Old Turnpike Road in Banner Elk. It was 1am when a neighbor spotted flames coming through the roof of the house and called authorities. Over fifty firefighters from nearly all area departments reported to the scene. The fire was under control by 5am. The home was completely destroyed. Avery fire marshal David Charles Vance said firefighters first thought the owners were in the house at the time of the fire. Further investigation, however, revealed that the owners were safe at their home in Boca Raton.

Though no one was killed, two firefighters were admitted to Cannon Memorial Hospital for heat exhaustion. Vance said they are doing ok.

SBI arson investigators were on the scene today, as is routine in fires of this size.

There was work being done on the house earlier this week. That, and the possibility of lightning from last night's thunderstorms are being explored as possible causes. Vance hopes a thorough investigation will determine how the fire started.

The owner, contractor Edward Richard Ellman was notified and is handling the news well, housekeeper Nancy Ozinga says. The Ellmans expected to return to Banner Elk in two weeks.