Stephanie Hemmens

xxnovemberxx@hotmail.com

Psychology Department

Cal State Long Beach

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“Brush Fire”

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**Brush Fire**

A seven-acre brush fire destroyed a house and a small barn on the north side of Highway 280 near Woodside Road Thursday afternoon.

Melinda Frades, 69, has owned and lived at the property for 22 years. The estimated value of it is $1.2 million, according to the county assessor.

The events played out like this:

Frades says she was returning from the grocery store when she saw smoke. After calling 911 from her cell phone, the Fire Department responded within 15 minutes.

The fire began at about 12:30 p.m. at the bottom of a hill adjacent to the highway, according to Woodside Fire Capt. Jan Spiegel. It spread to the top, where it reached the single-story ranch-style house. About 40 firefighters from the Woodside Fire Department and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection responded at 12:45 p.m. The firefighters contained the flames at 3:30 p.m. Firefighters walked around with shovels, making sure the fire was out for good. One firefighter sought medical treatment for possible heat exhaustion.

At the height of the blaze, large clouds of black smoke were blowing across the highway, causing traffic to back up in each direction.

According to the National Weather Service, the winds were 10 mph from the southeast, with gusts up to 20 mph.

Firefighters evacuated several neighbors on either side of Frades’ property. “No one was home at the time,” Spiegal says, but Frades’ dog and three cats are missing.

Spiegal says investigators are working to determine the cause of the blaze. “Looks like it might have been something somebody threw from a car,” Spiegal says. “We’ll know more in the next few days.”

Steam rose from a black carpet of ashes mixed with water. All that remains on the property are a scorched brick fireplace, strips of metal roofing and a toilet.

As the sun slipped behind the foothills and the sky turned dark, Frades stared vacantly at the hot spots that remained in the smoking rubble. Twisted pieces of metal roofing squeaked in the wind. Frades sat on the rear bumper of a paramedic’s van, drinking water out of a mug. “Kind of old to start all over,” she said, kicking absently at a metal dog dish.