

# Fire engine 'too small'

Family watch in horror as under-resourced department fights home blaze

**KERUSHUN PILLAY**

THE uMgungundlovu District Fire Service is allegedly lacking in vital resources, including fire engines, which is hampering their ability to deliver services.

This emerged yesterday after an Ashburton family watched in horror as part of their family home of 45 years caught fire in the early hours of the morning.

Two garage spaces, used by family members as hobby workshops, were gutted in the blaze, which firefighters worked for about seven hours to completely extinguish.

Sources close to the fire service said they regularly need the assistance of nearby fire services such as Richmond. This is due to the serious lack of proper resources.

Sources further alleged that junior firefighters are responding to scenes without adequate training, and, because of this, firefighters themselves apparently feel they are a "danger to the public".

A resident of the house that was damaged yesterday, Lois Cross, told *The Witness* that the family were alerted to the fire at about 1 am by their gardener, who lives on the property.

"I heard the dogs barking and thought there may have been an intruder. He got up and saw the fire blazing and came to alert us."

She claimed they had called the fire department, which only responded with a small fire engine that was not adequate to handle the intensity of the fire.

"Neighbours were calling the fire department trying to get a bigger fire engine. Eventually one from Richmond [fire department] came."

Cross said she appreciated the work done by the firefighters who came out, but added: "Maybe if the right engine responded in time, the fire would have been contained earlier and we wouldn't have lost the second room."

The two areas that burned down were used by Cross' family to work on their passion of building things for the large aviary the family have behind their home.

She said one of the areas was



LEFT: Lois Cross surveys the damage after part of her family's Ashburton home was damaged in a fire yesterday morning.

**"Neighbours were calling the fire department trying to get a bigger fire engine."**

used to store bird feed and cages, and also had a few gas cylinders, a stove and a fridge in it.

The roof of one section was destroyed in the fire.

"I panicked. We were just focused on getting the cars away

from the fire and we tried to give as many possessions as we could to neighbours just in case."

She added that she was grateful no one was harmed.

Cross lives in a granny flat on the property, while the main house is occupied by her daughter, Linda Nel, and Linda's husband, Richard, and son, Colin.

uMgungundlovu spokesperson Mbali Ndlovu said the lack of resources for firefighters "is a financial matter and senior management is fully aware. Plans to further empower the department

have commenced and will be communicated accordingly".

"We are currently looking into the adjustment budget, which will relatively alleviate the challenges in the fire stations that require urgent assistance."

She denied that junior firefighters were ever sent to scenes without the necessary training.

Firefighters were invited to use an employee assistance programme to assist them to deal with work pressures, she said.

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BELOW: Lois Cross assesses the damage to a garage-cum-workshop that once held numerous bird cages and bird feed for the family's aviary. PHOTOS: KERUSHUN PILLAY

