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Community rallies around family
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RIVERDALE — Riverdale may be small in size, but it's big in heart when disaster strikes.

The compassion of local residents — joined by some from neighboring Pompton Lakes — was evident today as the community came to the rescue of a family of six left homeless by a fire the previous day.

Fabrizio and Symone Negrini and their four children, Bella, 5; Frankie, 8; Nico, 10; and Sal, 11, were not at home when fire broke out, but two cats, a dog, two birds, and two ferrets perished in the blaze.

The menagerie reflected the dedication of Symone Negrini, an animal control officer in neighboring Bloomingdale. Two family dogs were rescued by firefighters.

"They're basically sound and will be okay," said their veterinarian Dr. Michael Morris.

The family has taken Morris up on his offer of an apartment above his animal clinic on Hamburg Turnpike in Riverdale.

"They're welcome to stay as long as they have to," he said.

Meanwhile, the community's generosity poured into the borough's Community Center all day today, with people dropping off clothes, furniture, and food.

"The response has been overwhelming! I've never seen anything like it," said family friend Pam Sylvestri of Riverdale, who got on the phone and started a phone chain among parents after the fire was brought under control.

"People have donated money, clothes, toiletries, gift certificates ... some families have even donated mattresses," she said. Sylvestri said the family "is still in shock ... they lost everything and they're trying to figure out the next step."

Mrs. Negrini, she said, is an animal lover who will "pick up a stray and bring it home until they find a home for it."

Mayor William Budesheim took photos of people donating at the Community Center and was heartened by what he saw. He put a plea for help on the borough website for the family, "who lost all in fire."

"One of ours suffered a devastating loss and our community responded by opening their

hearts and their pocketbooks," he said. "We take care of our own here in Riverdale. This shows what small towns are all about."

That includes a kinship with Pompton Lakes — Riverdale youths attend the high school where a donation was taken for food and money.

Riverdale Self-Storage donated space for the family to store donations.

Sylvestri said "The family wants to thank everyone for their generous contributions and prayers during this difficult time. You couldn't ask for anything better than a community like this."

But more is needed, she said: "At this point, we're looking for any monetary donations, for food cards to supermarkets."

Anyone wishing to contribute may drop off donations between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. at the Community Center at 57 Loy Avenue or they can mail contributions to the attention of June Carelli at the Community Center. Dropoffs can also be left at Borough Hall during the day. Budesheim said.

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