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Fire ravages family farm in Cowichan Valley

Katherine Dedyna / Times Colonist

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A blaze near Duncan destroyed a barn and antique equipment.

A Cowichan Valley farm family is reeling from a huge fire Friday that claimed the family dog and destroyed 6,000 bales of hay, a large dairy barn, house trailer and many pieces of historic farm equipment.

No one was injured and flames did not reach the two homes on the 63-acre McLay Road property in Glenora, including one under construction by Colten Ellison, 25, great grandson of original owner Andy Ellison, who arrived from Alberta in 1947.

"It's something I never believed would happen to us," said Colten's father, Ken Ellison, 54, who grew up on Dellison Farm.

"I'm shaking now," said Ellison, who on Friday evening was able to see the hay still burning from inside his home. "The firemen believe they'll be there all night."

His son, Dayne, 20, said his sister-in-law's friend was in a trailer at the farm early Friday afternoon when she heard a huge bang. "All of a sudden it was just woof, the flames went right up."

Six trucks from the Duncan and Cowichan Bay fire departments responded after the call for help came in shortly before 1 p.m.

Dayne's mother, Anita, called him home from Victoria with news of the blaze.

"It was a shocking phone call to get," said Dayne, who dreads older brother Colten's reaction to the loss of the antique farm equipment, which he displayed at the annual Cowichan Exhibition. Colten was in Salmon Arm at the time of the fire.

Made of cedar, fir and creosote, the 100-by-100-foot barn, including lean-tos, "just went boom and it was gone," Ken said. The hay — which sells for \$8 to \$9 a bale — was insured, but not the 40-year-old dairy barn where it was tightly packed.

Until a dozen years ago, the Ellisons raised dairy cows, but now keep 34 head of beef cattle and eight Holsteins. The cattle escaped from the barn, thanks to a neighbour who used his excavator to knock in one end of the structure and curtail the blaze, giving the animals an exit route.

"We just have to go forward," said Ken, who was happy his father, Don Ellison, 79, was able to save a few of Colten's antiques, stored in the barn. The dog, Maggie, belonged to Colten's wife, Breanne.

The 63-acre farm supplied 7,000 to 8,000 bales of hay annually to the equine program at nearby Queen Margaret's School. Ken Ellison doesn't know where they'll get hay now. "[The school] may have to import it from Washington state or the Interior."

The cause of the fire is still under investigation.

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