

## Close call again

*Toys for Judy Tomanek's day care were among the few things in the back yard to escape yet another arson at the residence. The storage shed was destroyed, and the house was in danger of burning, too, except for the arrival of firefighters who were already at the fire hall for a training exercise.*

*More on crime: p. 2, 9*



Photos by Carmen Pauls

# Home narrowly escapes

Oct. 30, 2001

### *Fourth arson has family debating move*

Tiny amber beads speckle the wooden slats along the back of Vic and Judy Tomanek's home.

In a few days, the charred odor in the back yard will be gone. The moonscape of blackened timber will have been hauled away.

Soon, there will only be an empty space, devoid of grass, greenhouse or shed. And there will be those amber beads — sap congealing in the cool air.

Firefighters told Judy that those

beads grow when wood heats, proof that her home of 20 years was a moment away from burning to the ground.

The fire began at approximately 7 p.m. on Oct. 23. The Tomaneks' 14-year-old daughter Jolene was working on the computer in the living room; 13-year-old Travis was watching TV with friends after a pizza supper. The lights flickered. Travis went to put the pizza away. He glanced out the garage window, and "all he could see was orange," Judy recalled.

The next few moments were chaos — Travis screaming, Jolene

baffled, then hearing the window in her bedroom crack. Out the door they ran in stocking feet. Within minutes, the firefighters — mercifully, already in gear at the fire hall for a training exercise — showed up. If not for that coincidence, help might have come too late.

In five minutes, the flames were 30 ft. high. The second greenhouse disappeared, and then the shed, with its gas-powered lawnmower — a birthday gift from Judy to Vic. Flames shot up the power pole and up the neighbours' pine tree.

Continued on page 2

# Public support convinces family to stay on

## Continued from page 1

It was the fourth arson at the Tomaneks' home in three weeks. Since this last fire, the Tomaneks have scarcely slept. Vic has spoken with his employer, Saskatchewan Property Management Corporation, and a transfer is only a phone call away.

"We can leave here in a minute," Vic said. "It's all arranged."

For now, however, the Tomaneks are staying in La Ronge. The decision was clinched after Vic went to town council on Oct. 24, asking that

the Town of La Ronge seriously address the problem of youth crime.

"(We're staying) because of the unanimous support that I got from Mayor (Joe) Hordyski, (RCMP S/Sgt.) Ron Savidan, and all the council members, and because of all the people in the town phoning, hoping the best for us," he said.

"Their concern, their help offered, all this was overwhelming. It's unreal how people got behind us."

Still, he's frightened, and if it takes moving away to protect his family, he's ready to go. "My family's safety is my first con-

cern, no matter what it takes."

His hope is that justice will be done — that the culprits will be caught and locked up, and that no innocent youths will be blamed for the actions of a few. "They don't need us pounding them any more," he said. "I love teenagers. They're the future of this world."

And, he hopes that La Ronge will emerge from this crisis a safer, more tightly-knit and healthier community. He sees town council's decision to hold a brainstorming session on the issue of youth crime as proof that civic leaders share his goal. That meeting is Nov. 7.

"Out of all this bad, the town might get strong," he said. "I love this town, I love the people in this town, and I love the hockey in this town.... And it's my home."

Looking out at her scarred backyard, with its estimated \$20,000 worth of damage, Judy can't help but think what the insurance money could better have been spent on.

"It would have been a good down payment for a youth facility," she said.

"All this waste — for nothing," her husband agreed.

*Carmen Pauls*

*Staff*