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## Blaze devastates man's shop, livelihood

By CATHERINE BAUM  
Staff Writer

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Monday, January 19, 2009

NORTHAMPTON - The owner of an Easthampton Road woodworking business for 42 years will try to reclaim some of his tools and machinery after an early Saturday morning fire destroyed his uninsured shop.

Peter Payne Woodworking, which is owned by M&S Holdings and operated by Peter Payne, 69, of Northampton, caught fire Saturday around 3:12 a.m., when a passerby notified Northampton police. Northampton, Amherst and Easthampton fire departments responded to the fire, and Westhampton crews provided station back up.

The shop is located in a small industrial park at 8 Easthampton Road in Northampton.

The fire started when combustibles that were stored near a gas furnace ignited. Damage is estimated at \$200,000, according to Fire Chief Brian P. Duggan. Baystate Gas was called in to disable natural gas lines, which also caught fire. Helen Payne, Peter's wife, said her husband is "extremely careful" about the building's safety, and the fire was a surprise.

"Being a woodshop, everything's combustible in there," Helen Payne said. "He's very meticulous about these things. But that's what they're telling us, so that's what we have to accept."

The fire is under investigation by the Northampton Fire and Police departments and the state Fire Marshal's Office.

Red Cross assisted firefighters with hot coffee, doughnuts and warm shelter. Temperatures were below freezing as firefighters put out the fire, which lasted about three hours.

"It was a long battle," Payne said.

No one was hurt, including Czar, the couple's Siberian husky who often slept in the shop but was in their Northampton home that night.

Steven and Matthew Boulanger, who own the property, are in discussion with Payne about what to do next, including whether the shop can be rebuilt.

"The Boulanger boys are being as supportive as can be," Payne said. The Boulangers operate Richards Plumbing and Heating, which is also located in the industrial park. "They're going to try and salvage as much as they can."

Snow covers the remains of file cabinets, tables and chairs piled inside and outside the 3,000 square-foot building, which still smelled of burnt wood and rubber Sunday morning. The roof is collapsed on

1



CAROL LOLLIS

Peter Payne Woodworking at 8 Easthampton Road in Northampton sustained \$200,000 in damages, according to Fire Chief Brian P. Duggan. The blaze is under investigation, but the fire was believed to be started when combustibles stored near a gas furnace ignited.

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one side.

Once the ice thaws, Payne said her husband will collect what's left of his tools and equipment.

Payne is the only employee of Peter Payne Woodworking. He had made cabinets and repaired tables in the shop since it opened in 1967. Payne said her husband owned his shop and the building that now houses Richards Plumbing & Heating until 2007, when he became "somewhat retired" and a tenant to the Boulangers.

"This is his life," Payne said of her husband's business. "It was his whole world."

Northampton Lions Club, of which Payne is a member, is forming a group to help with the clean up.

"Everyone's been really supportive and understanding and he's very grateful for that," Payne said.

Catherine Baum can be reached at [cbaum@gazettenet.com](mailto:cbaum@gazettenet.com).

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Unfortunately, the financial reality of most small firms make that a reality today. Frankly, many small business owners have done little more than bought themselves a minimum-wage job, and the luxury of not working under the mediocre guidance of a "boss."

Nobody needs this type of disaster---esp. Mr. Payne at 69-y/o. All our hearts and help should go out to him. Thank you to the Red Cross and other social agencies.

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