

Struckmeyer undergoes surgery after March 18 Heartstrong Fire

Written by Brenda Johnson Brandt
Tuesday, 27 March 2012 21:29 -

Jennifer Struckmeyer, who suffered second- and third-degree burns on 25 percent of her body in the Heartstrong Fire in Yuma County March 18, underwent surgery for cleaning and skin grafting Tuesday, March 27.

Monday night her husband Del said the doctors at the burn unit at North Colorado Medical Center in Greeley indicated she would have grafting on her foot and hip and possibly her arms and hands. They did not think they would have to do anything on her face.

A member of the Wages Volunteer Fire Dept. in southwest Phillips County, Jennifer was assisting in fighting the Heartstrong Fire southeast of Yuma when the high winds shifted, the truck was stuck and she lost her boot as the fire approached and passed over her.

Del said Monday Jennifer is conscious, but is still on a ventilator and is semi-sedated. Doctors indicate when she is finished with her several-week stint in the burn unit, she will probably be looking at some rehab, said Del.

Del's brother Damon, who also was burned in the fire, had a check-up at the burn unit Monday. His right elbow and back are healing nicely. He was instructed to keep moving, keep his burn cream on and return in two weeks.

Damon was initially hospitalized overnight in Yuma after the fire.

Darren Stewart, a nephew of the Struckmeyers, suffered burns on his right eye and his nose. He was released from the Yuma Hospital the same night as the fire.

Damon reported Monday that Darren has returned to work. His eye is okay and the second-degree burn on his nose and some burns on his hands are healing well.

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Damon went to the burn unit for an appointment to assess his wounds last Thursday, March 22. His wife Pam was with him. Pam was in the cab of the firetruck when the fire passed over it Sunday, so escaped injury then.

As if the family isn't dealing with enough, she wasn't feeling well at Damon's appointment, so they took her to the emergency room. She was diagnosed with appendicitis and had her appendix removed. She's feeling much better now, as well.

The Struckmeyer family is extremely grateful to the Northeast Colorado community for the support they've felt.

Jennifer's address for the next few weeks is:

**Jennifer Struckmeyer
NMC Burn Unit
1801 16th St., Room 304
Greeley, CO 80631**

Donations in Jennifer's name are being accepted at Holyoke Community Federal Credit Union, 101 W. Denver St., Holyoke, CO 80734. Donors are asked to write "donation" on the checks.

Additionally, donations are being collected at Ardie's Beauty Barr at 235 S. Campbell in Holyoke.

Cause of fire investigated

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Yuma County Sheriff's Office was notified Friday, March 23 of the results of the investigation done by YW Electric's experts concerning the cause of the Heartstrong Fire.

Notice from the sheriff's office Friday said it has been confirmed a power line was broken by high winds and fell to the ground, causing an arc of electricity, subsequently igniting dry grass to cause the fire.

"YW's safety equipment worked as it should have and killed power to the line after the arc. The system notified the company of the broken line," according to the Yuma County Sheriff's report.

The sheriff's office has ruled out any criminal activity as a possibility for the cause of the fire.

Preliminary reports are still being used to figure loss of livestock and property in the blaze that covered 24,000 acres or 38 square miles.

The sheriff's office reported last week they do know about 80 miles of fence will need to be replaced and farmers and ranchers will need to condition their land against top soil blowing away from high winds.

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