

The Free Lance-Star

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FIRE DOES MORE DAMAGE THAN CIVIL WAR



SUZANNE CARR / THE FREE LANCE-STAR

Only a brick shell remains after a fire broke out at historic Idlewild in Fredericksburg early yesterday. The dwelling—built in 1858—was occupied by the Downman family, its original owners, until the 1950s. The site is now slated for development.

Historic house now a hulk

Some hope to salvage elements of city's Idlewild

By ELIZABETH PEZZULLO
THE FREE LANCE-STAR

Fire raged through Fredericksburg's historic Idlewild mansion yesterday, leaving just the brick walls of the elaborately designed 19th-century house standing.

Whether the structure that survived the Civil War can be saved now is unclear. However, local preservationists say they plan to try.

The fire started before 4 a.m., said Reggie Phillips, a spokesman for the Fredericksburg Fire Department.

As firefighters arrived on the scene off State Route 3 just east of Interstate 95, the back of the house already was fully engulfed in flames, Phillips said.

It took about four hours to suppress the blaze, which destroyed about 80 percent of the dilapidated mansion last occupied in 1989. Water had to be trucked in by tankers to douse the flames.

"There's no water up here, so it had to be shuttled back and forth," Phillips said.

There were no injuries, and the cause of the fire is unknown at this point. Investigators were expected to return to the



A firefighter snapped this photo of the fire engulfing the house. A motorist on Interstate 95 reported the blaze at 4:01 a.m.

scene today.

The mansion, tucked behind the Home Depot, has been the scene of vandalism for years.

Yesterday's fire adds another chapter to the mansion's storied history.

In 1858, William Yates Downman, a distant cousin of George Washington, had the house

built for his family on what was once a 400-acre tract.

The Gothic Revival-style house, with its pointed windows and elaborate exterior woodwork, makes it unique.

"The house had more gingerbread features than any other house in this area," said Donald Pfanz, a historian with Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park. "And it's probably only the real plantation-style house in Fredericksburg."

The house was outfitted with a stained-glass entranceway, marble fireplaces and vaulted ceilings.

It also had dogwood rosette medallions around the lighting fixtures.

"It was very tasteful," said a saddened Donna Chasen. The Fredericksburg resident said she's been "obsessed" with preserving Idlewild for the last five years.

She was devastated to learn of the fire. "It was like I hit a brick wall," said Chasen, who spent yesterday morning walking the grounds of Idlewild assessing the damage, and urging firefighters to save as much of the house as possible.

"It's just unbelievable, it was just a beautiful house that drew people in," said Chasen, clutching a piece of woodwork from the exterior of the house.

"We try to preserve as much as we can, but we've got to put the fire out," Phillips said.

In 2000, the Preservation

See FIRE, BACK PAGE

Big fights in Iraq war 'are over'

■ Meetings begin today on building a new government now that Saddam Hussein's 35-year regime has come to an end.

By DAVID ESPO
AP SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Saddam Hussein's hometown of Tikrit fell yesterday with unexpectedly light resistance, the last Iraqi city to succumb to overpowering U.S.-led ground and air forces. A senior Pentagon general said "major combat engagements" probably are over in the 26-day-old war.

As fighting wound down, Pentagon officials disclosed plans to pull two aircraft carriers from the Persian Gulf. At the same time, Iraqi power brokers looked ahead to discussions on a postwar government at a U.S.-arranged meeting set for today.

"I would anticipate that the major combat engagements are over," Maj. Gen. Stanley McChrystal told reporters at the Pentagon.

AMERICA ATTACKS

INSIDE

Families of MIAs in Iraq yearn for news of loved ones' fates.
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Bush administration warns Syria against aiding terrorists.
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Tikrit fell with no sign of the ferocious last stand by Saddam loyalists that some military planners had feared.

Secretary of State Colin Powell hinted at economic or diplomatic sanctions against Syria, saying the government is developing a weapons of mass destruction program and helping Iraqis flee the dying regime. Syrian officials denied the charges.

Looting eased in Baghdad after
See IRAQ, BACK PAGE

Two Marines are almost neighbors

Men both hail from King George but meet at sea

By RUTH FINCH
THE FREE LANCE-STAR

Both of the two young Marines thought the other looked familiar. They soon learned they had more in common than either could have imagined.

Lance Cpl. Michael P. Cornwell and Pfc. Jason Weaver both graduated from King George High School—Cornwell in 2000 and Weaver in 2001. Their parents live less than 10 miles apart. Their younger sisters had been classmates at King George High.

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Name: Lance Cpl. Michael Cornwell Jr.

Age: 20

Duty: Rescue firefighter with the Marine Crash Fire Rescue 273, Detachment A, of Beaufort, S.C.

Name: Pfc. Jason Weaver

Age: 21

Duty: Food service specialist with the Marine Wing Harrier Squadron of Cherry Point, N.C.

Iraqi palace proves Odai loved fast lane

Saddam's son liked wine, women, cars

By NIKO PRICE
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

BAGHDAD, Iraq—His personal zoo has lions, cheetahs and a bear. His storehouse has \$1 million in fine wines, liquor and heroin. His house has Cuban cigars, cases of champagne and downloaded pictures of prostitutes.

While most Iraqis suffered under the U.N. sanctions that drove their country into poverty, Saddam Hussein's eldest son, Odai, lived a life of fast cars, expensive liquor and easy women, a tour through his bombed



Odai Hussein

Army Capt. Ed Ballanco, of Montville, N.J. "It looked like something at the Playboy mansion."

Among the photos were those of Jenna and Barbara Bush, President Bush's 21-year-old daughters, "dressed up very nice in evening

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Study: Walks won't cut heart disease's death risk

By EMMA ROSS
AP MEDICAL WRITER

LONDON—A half-hour brisk walk every day may make you feel better, but it is not enough to ward off premature death from heart trouble, new research suggests.

A study published this week in Heart, a British medical journal, found that only vigorous exercise—such as jogging, hiking, climbing stairs, racket sports and swimming—seems to help lower the risk of early death from heart disease. Other research has shown moderate exercise helps.

Official government recommendations in the United States

and elsewhere say 30 minutes of moderate activity every day, such as brisk walking, is sufficient for heart health. A major World Health Organization consensus report published last month reached the same conclusion.

But the latest study, conducted by scientists at Queen's University in Belfast, Northern Ireland, found that activities considered to provide mild exercise—such as walking, bowling and sailing—as well as pursuits of moderate intensity—such as golfing, dancing and brisk walking—did not lower the risk of early death among 2,000 British men followed

'It will create a big stir.'

Dr. Ron Sha

Duke University Diet and Fitness Center, on findings of British heart-disease study

for a decade.

"It's very compelling. It does kind of fly in the face of what we have been trying to tell people, and I think it will create a big stir," said Dr. Ron Sha, medical director of the Duke University Diet and Fitness Center in Durham, N.C.

Sha was not involved in the study. Previous research has yielded conflicting results, dividing experts between a group that believes moderate exercise is enough and a smaller group convinced that vigorous exercise is needed before any heart benefit can occur.

"This is one report. It's important to have this information, but it's not sufficient for us to now scrap our recommendations, which rest on a huge amount of evidence," said Steven Blair, president of the Cooper Institute, a

See EXERCISE, BACK PAGE

SPORTS

Farewell to D.C.

Michael Jordan laces up his Nikes one last time in Washington, but the Wizards lose.

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REGION

Pretty pooches

Owners, dogs show off at Greater Fredericksburg Kennel Club dog show.

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FAMILY

Cheap Peeps

Bargain shopping makes inexpensive Easter baskets—and happy kids.

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SUNSHINE

Breezy and warm.

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