

# Observer-Reporter

OUR 203RD YEAR, WASHINGTON, PA

50 CENTS

www.observer-reporter.com

MONDAY,  
MARCH 14,  
2011



## 'They all want to go home'

Claysville care home owner resolved to rebuild residence after fire

By KATHIE O. WARCO, Staff writer  
kwarco@observer-reporter.com

CLAYSVILLE – For the 18 men who lived there, Bethel Personal Care Home in Claysville was their home and they considered one another their family.

But that all changed 10 days ago when fire swept through the sanctuary of the former Green Street United Presbyterian Church adjacent to the home, forcing them to flee into the chilly night air. They, along with residents of Mama's House, which is next to Bethel, sought shelter at Claysville Volunteer Fire Department as fire crews from numerous companies battled the blaze that started just before midnight March 3.

Now Joyce Ewing, whose family owns both personal care homes, is determined to repair the building and return all of the residents, mostly Vietnam War-era veterans, back to the building at the corner of Green and Elm streets.

Most of the men are staying at one of three other facilities owned by Ewing, including Mama's House. She also has a home in Waynesburg, Greene County.

"But they all want to go home," Ewing said. "Many of these men lived there for years. One lived there for 28 years, and another, 21."

"Everyone in town knows them; they are part of the community. Often, they'll walk down to Main Street and sit on the benches," she added. "I absolutely want to make sure they stay in Claysville."

"The guys are willing to do whatever they can to stay together. They've become their own family."

Ewing said the personal care home will have to be gutted before it can be rebuilt. Complicating her plans, however, is the fact that the house was underinsured.

"I am going to have rely on the goodwill of the community for some donations either of cash or in-kind donations, like materials and labor," Ewing said.

The personal care home was in an area that had once been a fellowship hall for the former Presbyterian church.

"It was built later than the sanctuary, which had been built more than 100 years ago," Ewing said. "It had been used as a bomb shelter, so it is very sturdily built, including with concrete floors."

"There was a fire wall between the sanctuary and the personal care home, which prevented the fire from spreading," she added. "But some of the windows were blown out, and we lost a bed and dressers when the heat from the fire caused an oxygen tank to explode."

Ewing said her staff and the firefighters did a remarkable job. The men were removed from Bethel in about 60 seconds, as was the house dog, Milo.

"The firefighters thought they'd be recovering bodies," Ewing said. "They couldn't believe everyone was out so quickly."

But even after the fire was out, no one could find Fluffy, a black, short-haired cat owned by Jerry Prager, who lived at the home.

"He was so distraught," Ewing said of her long-time resident.

Please see Home, Page A2



Jerry Prager, 69, has his cat, Fluffy, back with him after a fire destroyed Bethel Personal Care Home in Claysville, below, where Prager lived with his cat and other veterans. One of the care home owners, Barry Ewing, found Fluffy the morning after the blaze hiding under a bed in Prager's room. Prager has been a resident at the home for 22 years.

PHOTOS BY JIM MCCUNTT / OBSERVER-REPORTER



## 10K dead amid fears of nuclear meltdown

ASSOCIATED PRESS

SENDAI, Japan – The estimated death toll from Japan's disasters climbed past 10,000 Sunday as authorities raced to combat the threat of multiple nuclear reactor meltdowns and hundreds of thousands of people struggled to find food and water. The prime minister said it was the nation's worst crisis since World War II.

Nuclear plant operators worked frantically to try to keep temperatures down in several reactors crippled by the earthquake and tsunami, wrecking at least two by dumping sea water into them in last-ditch efforts to avoid meltdowns. Officials warned of a



A patient in a wheelchair is helped by attendants as they evacuate a tsunami-affected hospital at Otsuchi, northeastern Japan, Sunday.

Please see Japan, Page A2

## GOP donors taking time to get into race

ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON – The potential White House candidates need cash.

But donors aren't eager to shell out until the hopeful prove they're credible.

Which they can't – until they have the cash lined up to start their campaigns.

This helps explain why the 2012 Republican primary race has yet to begin in earnest.

"It's a little sluggish. The major donor folks are sitting back a bit," said Rob Bickhart, a former Republican National Committee finance chairman helping ex-Sen. Rick Santorum of Pennsylvania.

"The major donor folks, I think, are a little slower getting started because the whole process was slower to get started," said Bickhart, who helped raise money for former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney four years ago. "The last one started, it seemed, after World War I,

### ELECTION 2012

and folks were just exhausted." Less than a year before the lead-off primaries and caucuses, many of the Republican Party's biggest fundraisers aren't aligned with any one candidate. Mindful of the lessons of 2008, many are holding back to see who emerges as a front-runner in a field that lacks one.

"I have spoken to just about everyone," said Larry Bathgate, RNC finance chairman under Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush. Bathgate isn't sold on a 2012 candidate yet. "The general gist is, 'We have to get rid of Obama ... he's too leftist and out of touch,'" Bathgate said.

He agrees. But that doesn't mean he's ready to open his vast network of donors to a candidate right now. None has convinced

Please see GOP, Page A2

### A LITTLE RETURN

Everyday investors are piling back into stocks, finally ready for more risk and hoping the recent rally has further to go.

PAGE B4



### THAT TIME AGAIN

Get your NCAA tournament bracket ready for March Madness starting Tuesday.

PAGE A6,7

### VICTIMS RECALL CRASH

NTSB releases transcripts of deadly Philadelphia duck boat crash.

PAGE B1

### WEATHER



Times of clouds and sun.  
High 45. Low 27.  
Complete weather,  
PAGE A12

### INDEX

- Business .....B4
- Classified .....B8-12
- Comics .....B5
- Entertainment .....B6,7
- Goren .....B10
- Horoscope .....B10
- Lifestyles .....A10
- Local news .....A9
- Lottery .....A12
- Obituaries .....A8
- Opinion .....A11
- Public notices .....B9
- Sports .....B1-3
- Television .....B6

### HOW TO REACH US

To report a missing paper: 724-222-2201  
To start a subscription: 724-222-2201  
To place a classified ad: 724-222-0303  
Online: www.observer-reporter.com

