

THE ASPEN TIMES

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‘We are not alone’ › Basalt family thankful for support after losing everything in house fire

Scott Condon
The Aspen Times

Estela Garcia Lopez was settled into the front row at The Temporary on Saturday evening preparing to watch Aspen Santa Fe Ballet’s Folklorico program when she noticed her cellphone was blowing up.

It was supposed to be a special night for Estela and her husband, Martin Garcia, because Estela is typically working at the concession stand at Folklorico events. But Saturday she was in position to finally relax and watch her two children perform dances.

The sheer number of telephone calls she missed forced her to return a call from neighbor before the dancing began.

“They said, ‘Estela, where are you? Your house is burning,’” she recalled from the house of a friend Wednesday.

The Garcias rushed to Homestead Park in Basalt and found their house of 13 years in flames.

“I was in shock. My house was on fire,” Estela said. “We lost everything.”

HOW TO HELP

Aspen Santa Fe Ballet has launched a GoFundMe campaign to help the Garcia family, who lost their home and all possessions in a fire in Basalt on Saturday night. The web page can be found at www.gofundme.com and then search for The Garcia Family Emergency Fund.

Added Martin: “When you leave the house, you only take the clothes you are wearing and your keys.”

The contents that did not burn were destroyed by smoke and water. The family didn’t have insurance on the mobile home because of its age. They had been exploring getting insurance on their possessions but hadn’t acted yet.

The Roaring Fork Fire Rescue Department determined the fire started in a utility room where the furnace was located. The fire was ruled accidental.

The couple’s children were dancing with Folklorico while the tragedy unfolded. Ximena, 15, a sophomore at Basalt High



ANNA STONEHOUSE/THE ASPEN TIMES

Martin and Estela Garcia at a friend’s house in Basalt on Tuesday. The couple and their two children lost their home and all possessions in a fire Saturday.

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ON NEWSSTANDS



Cocktail Classic

Get the lowdown on this weekend’s Apres Ski Cocktail Classic in this week’s **Aspen Times Weekly**.

INSIDE

A chance to fly

As Aspen High School prepares for its spring performance of “Peter Pan,” students sing while being suspended from the ceiling by wire. **PAGE A3**

Runoff for Aspen mayor could change makeup of City Council

Council could appoint the position or set a special election to fill vacancy if Mullins wins

Carolyn Sackariason
The Aspen Times

Depending on results of the Aspen mayoral runoff election, the makeup of City Council might not be decided until July.

That’s because candidate Ann Mullins is in the middle of serving her four-year council term and if elected mayor, she would be leaving a vacancy for her and her fellow electeds to fill.

The city’s policy to fill a vacancy is for council to appoint a new member within 30 days of the vacancy, which would presumably be June 10 when new members are sworn in.

That is when council members-elect

Rachel Richards and Skippy Mesirow will take office, as well as the new mayor, which will either be Torre or Mullins.

“The concept is that before she takes office she would have to resign,” City Attorney Jim True said Wednesday.

Within a month of that resignation, council would have to allow time for applications to be filled out and submitted by interested Aspen residents. Elected officials would then schedule interviews with those applicants before making the decision by secret ballot in a public meeting.

In previous vacancy situations as a result of the elected official taking a new seat, council has chosen the next highest vote getter in the election, said former City Clerk, Kathryn Koch, who oversaw Aspen’s political races for decades.

“The thinking was they put in the time and money to run so they should get it,” Koch said.

The most recent instance in which that occurred was in 2013 when Steve Skadron left his council seat to be mayor.

After a bit of controversy on council’s deadlock between two applicants, Howie Mallory and Dwayne Romero, the board chose Romero, who came in third in that election.

The council had been split 2-2. As part of the city’s election code that decided stalemates at the time, elected officials turned to a “by lot” process, True said.

“There are a number of procedures that could be used,” he said, adding it could’ve been a flip of the coin, or a throw of the dice.

Koch said her office wrote into the election code the roll of the dice would be the deciding factor in that tie.

But it was never used because Skadron, who initially supported Mallory, eventually fell to Romero to avoid such an important decision going to the luck of the dice.

True said the dice clause has been removed from the election code and it’s now up to council to choose the process to fill a vacancy.

RUNOFF, A11





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FAMILY
From page A1

School, and Joel, 11, a fifth-grader at Basalt Middle School, learned the family lost everything after the performance.

It was hard enough losing their house and possessions. It was tragic that the Garcias two pets died — a chihuahua named Cosita and a parrot named Joey.

Now, the family is trying to recover from the shock. Aspen Santa Fe Ballet provided them with an apartment for the short term. They are looking for lodging to get them through roughly four months. Meanwhile, they are exploring the idea of purchasing a new mobile home and returning to Homestead Park. Friends and acquaintances have rallied to supply them with clothing and necessities of everyday life.

“Fortunately, (we) have good friends,” Martin said.

“I am impressed that we are not alone,” Estela added. “The response of people — they have broken my heart.”

She meant it in a good way. One of their closest friends is Polly Pollard, who started working as a tutor with Estela 12 years ago through English in Action.

“Everybody is just heartbroken over what happened,” Pollard said.

She said Martin and Estela are very involved in the community, so they are well-known. Estela gives back through English in Action by working with beginning students. She also is active in the music and choir program at St. Vincent Catholic Church in Basalt. She’s been active in volunteering with the Folklórico program since Ximena and Joel got involved when they were in preschool.

Estela and Martin were both professionals in Mexico City before they moved to the Roaring Fork Valley. Estela operated



ANNA STONEHOUSE/THE ASPEN TIMES

Estela Garcia Lopez shows a picture she has of her two children on her cellphone. She said she lost most of her pictures in the fire.

her own clinic. Martin was an electrical engineer.

It was difficult for them to find employment in their professions after they immigrated to the U.S. In the Roaring Fork Valley, Estela works as a professional trainer in Carbondale. Martin works in the engineering department at the Snowmass Club.

They are determined to rebuild their lives in Basalt and specifically at Homestead Park. Estela asked her kids if they wanted to move to a different house after the tragedy. They want to stay put.

For all of them, it’s where their friends are located. It’s close to the schools and the institutions that are part of their lives.

It’s also where their pets were buried

this week, in the backyard.
The folks at Aspen Santa Fe Ballet have started a GoFundMe account to help the Garcias. It can be found by searching for The Garcia Family Emergency Fund. As of Wednesday afternoon, more than \$27,000 had been raised.

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Ann Mullins’ integrated approach protects, preserves, and improves Aspen’s community, economy, environment, and culture.



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ANN MULLINS
ASPEN MAYOR

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AnnForAspen



Ann Mullins

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Through Rewrite of the Land Use Code, Support for the Historic Preservation Program, Parks Protection and Improvement
- PROMOTING A HEALTHY COMMUNITY**
Through Social Services Support, Board of Health and Tobacco Tax
- PROTECTING THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT**
Through Introduction of Water-Saving Landscape Ordinance, Endorsing Stream and River Management Plans, Bringing Electric Buses to Aspen through work on RFTA Board, Keeping Aspen Electric 100% Renewable through work on RWAPA Board
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By facilitating the successful restructuring of the Red Brick Center, initiating the year-long celebration of Bauhaus 100 Aspen, advocating for the Shining Mountain Film Festival



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