



2 Teens charged in press box, Royalton arson fires

By Press And Journal Staff : 9/22/2010

Two Middletown boys, ages 12 and 13, set a fire that destroyed the concession stand and press box at Middletown Area High School's baseball field, using a lighter to ignite hand sanitizer as it dripped from a dispenser on the wall, Lower Swatara Twp. police said.

The same boys have been charged with arson for setting a fire in a portable toilet at Royalton's Kiwanis Park that spread to an adjacent construction trailer, state police said. The 12-year-old lit hand sanitizer, while the 13-year-old lit toilet paper, said Jeff Sarver, a state police fire marshal.

The 12-year-old confessed Tuesday, Sept. 21, to setting the fire at the baseball field, said Det. Robert Appleby, a Lower Swatara officer who investigated that arson. Both boys were expected to be charged as juveniles this week in that arson, said Appleby.

Police did not release the names of the boys.

The boys were caught after they told other children at their school about the toilet fire, police said.

The story reached a family friend, who brought the pair to the Middletown Police Department, said Sarver. State police contacted the boys' parents and interviewed the kids, who confessed, said Sarver.

Lower Swatara police were notified, and Appleby interviewed the 12-year-old, who confessed to the baseball field arson.

The boys hung out at the baseball field, but snuck out of their homes at night on July 21 with a mission: To set the concession stand on fire, police said.

They kicked the door 12 times until it opened, said Appleby. They squeezed out some hand sanitizer from the wall dispenser, and lit it as it dripped from the nozzle, he said.

As smoke began to rise from the two-story building, they crawled away on their bellies Army-style to avoid detection, said Appleby.

A police officer discovered the fire around 1 a.m. It had been burning for about an hour, authorities said.

The boys decided to light the portable toilet while hanging out at Kiwanis Park on Sunday, Sept. 12, said Sarver.

"They were bored, and while at the ball park, one used the bathroom and saw the hand sanitizer and got the idea to light it," he said.

The teens left the scene without calling the fire department around 4:30 p.m., shortly after seeing the portable toilet go up in smoke, Sarver said.

The boys were charged with arson, reckless endangerment, criminal mischief, destruction to unattended property, and other offenses.

It's unlikely the teens would face jail time because it was their first offense, said Sarver.

"They will be referred to a juvenile probation officer and punishment will be based on an interview to investigate home life and personal characteristics," he said.

The boys are the youngest suspects that Appleby has ever encountered. He expected to be questioning teenagers about the baseball field fire.

"I was quite taken aback by their ages," admitted Appleby. "It shocked me. They need help. Both kids need help."

A third suspicious fire is still under investigation. Arson was blamed for the July 29 fire that destroyed the 200-year-old Middletown building that once housed the Mansion House restaurant.

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