



# Cheney FREE PRESS

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One of the three grain elevators in Pine City caught was destroyed by fire late Monday evening.

Roger Harnack/Cheney Free Press

## Flames race across region

### Blaze devours Malden

By Roger Harnack  
Publisher

MALDEN — High winds and dry weather conditions propelled a wall of flames southwest across rural Spokane and Whitman counties Monday, leveling homes, businesses and government offices.

Approximately 75 percent of structures in Malden burned to the ground, including City Hall, the post office, a gas station and a historic church.

Burned-out cars were visible throughout town adjacent to what was left of homes and garages.

Local ranchers and residents manned hoses and buckets of water to try to keep flames at bay as they returned to their homes late Monday evening.

Dubbed the Babb Fire, the cause remains under investigation, interagency fire spokeswoman Sydney McBride said.

Area farmers and ranchers, however, said they believed the fire began when gusty winds toppled a tree on power lines near a dry wheat field near Babb Road, between Cheney and Rosalia about noon.

Once the wheat caught

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A Whitman County fire vehicle passes through a wall of flames on Wells Road north of Walden on Monday.

Roger Harnack/Cheney Free Press

### Wildfire engulfs acreage by casino

By DREW LAWSON  
Staff Reporter

AIRWAY HEIGHTS—Smoke filled the West Plains skies and city residents stood by awaiting potential evacuation recommendations due to a 260-acre fire burning grass and timber northeast of Northern Quest Casino Monday.

Crews responded to a vegetation fire off North Old Trail Road at 4:31 p.m. Monday and remained on scene into Tuesday. As of press time, one outbuilding had burned, according to Guy Gifford of the Department of Natural Resources. The fire had been controlled, but 0% containment had been reached as of Tuesday morning.

Crews had yet to complete a trail around the fire at press time.

“Crews will be working on creating a line (around the fire) and protecting structures,” Gifford said.

A Level 2 evacuation notice was given to residents in the area east of Hayford Road, west of Spotted and Indian Bluff Roads, north of Trails and

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### Go Fund Me set up for Bliesner family

By JOHN McCALLUM  
Managing Editor

CHENEY — The only warning Malden residents John and Carolyn Bliesner had of the coming disaster was the urgent pounding on their door and yelled instructions to leave — now.

The couple’s daughter, Connie Marsh, said they only had time to grab a few things before they bolted from their home on West Moreland and fled to nearby Rosalia to seek shelter along with other residents from the

firestorm that consumed 70-80 percent of the small Whitman County town.

“It’s hard to understand,” Marsh of Cheney said Tuesday morning. “It sounded like the winds changed direction.”

The fire began near Babbs Road in Spokane County, but driven by high winds quickly grew, crossing into Whitman County and decimating Malden and Pine City to the southwest.

“It was moving hot and moving quick,” Marsh said. “They had

no time.”

The couple escaped with only the clothes on their backs, losing their home and everything in the fire, including Carolyn’s medical equipment and medications needed to battle a long-term health condition. Making the destruction worse, Marsh said, is they had no homeowners insurance, having made a decision to forgo the protection because of their fixed income — John works as a custodian at Eastern Washington University

— and medical needs.

Marsh has set up a Go Fund Me page to help with expenses. Donations can be made at “Fire relief for the Bliesner Family.”

The couple has since found accommodations in Rosalia through some friends from their church. Marsh said they are “inconsolable,” especially her mom, having been forced to leave so quickly that they had to leave their two cats behind.

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