

Hero credited with saving life of woman in burning trailer

by Cheryl McDermott

Reluctant Hero "just felt it was something he had to do" Officials: If it were not for what he did, Oma Pratt would have perished in the fire

The Crook County Sheriff's officials have identified the man who ran into a burning mobile home and pulled a woman to safety in SE Prineville Sunday night, saying that she wouldn't have survived if she had remained inside for another 30 seconds.

A 911 emergency call was received shortly before 9 p.m., August 12 reporting a residential fire in Space 17 at 966 Combs Flat Road, Undersheriff Jim Hensley reported. Two sheriff's deputies happened to be conducting a traffic stop only 300 yards away when the call came in, and were told by witnesses that a man had entered the burning trailer to find the female resident, Oma Pratt, 54.

Deputy Barry Seguin and Emergency Services Commander (ESC) Brandon Smith arrived on scene to find the mobile home nearly fully engulfed in flames. Deputy Seguin went to the door of the residence and entered,

Hensley said, staying low to the floor. About eight-feet from the door he came across the hero who put his life at risk to save a stranger, and the woman he was attempting to save.

38-year old Dennis Morton of Prineville was driving in the area with his wife, Debi, when he noticed smoke near the EZ-Livinâ€™™ Mobile Home Park. According to the news release, Morton drove into the park, jumped out of his vehicle, and ran toward the burning home.

Morton ignored his wifeâ€™™s urging not to go inside when he was told by standers that Pratt had not exited. Apparently someone had torn the door from the door jamb, and the debris was blocking the entrance. The hero cleared the doorway and entered, Hensley reported.

Although the structure was nearly fully engulfed in fire, the immediate area by the front door was only filled with very dense smoke. Morton crawled on hands and knees, feeling his way through the smoke, calling out but not hearing a response.

About 12-feet inside, he found Pratt lying on the floor and could hear her labored breathing, the undersheriff said. Knowing she was in distress, he began pulling her toward the door, making it to within a few feet before Deputy Seguin arrived. Seguin also risked his life, entering the burning structure to help

Morton pull the victim out the last few feet to the doorway.

When Pratt was pulled to the entrance, ESC Smith assisted Seguin and Morton carry the woman a safer distance from the trailer. Morton stayed with the deputies to help care for Pratt until paramedics arrived on scene, then left before he could be identified or interviewed.

The victim was taken to Pioneer Memorial Hospital and later transported by Air Life to St. Charles Medical Center. Pratt was later transferred to the burn center at Portland's Emanuel Hospital.

Morton, identified and located later, is a reluctant hero who initially wanted to remain anonymous, Hensley said. He told deputies that by trying to help Pratt, he "just felt it was something he had to do," adding

that if his family member were in a similar circumstance that he would hope someone would come to their aid in the same way.

Deputy Fire Chief Jim Dean of the Crook County Fire and Rescue Department said, "If the victim would have been in the residence another 30 seconds, she would not have survived." Undersheriff Jim Hensley echoed those thoughts: "Dennis Morton saved Oma Pratt's life by his actions and if it were not for what he did, Oma Pratt would have perished in the fire."

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