

# Juvenile Fire Prevention Task Force

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 1

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## Monroe County Juvenile Fire Prevention Task Force

### Prevention and Education Are The Goals BY FRED RION

#### Special points of interest:

- *Safety & Prevention Information*
- *Treatment Resources in OUR Community*
- *Up To Date Research*
- *Safety Tips*
- *Educational Information*

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The purpose of this newsletter will be to inform and educate professionals, parents and all parties who are interested in working with children and families and some of the difficult issues facing that population today.

This newsletter is being brought to you by the Monroe County Juvenile Fire Prevention Task Force and Monroe County Fire Bureau. The Task Force was formed in late 2001. The Juvenile Fire Prevention Task Force is a group of professionals and parents from the community who are committed to research and education about the community-wide problem of fire prone children and their misuse/abuse of fire. Our goal is

to establish effective preventive measures when it comes to children and the problem of fire setting.

As our group has worked together over the last 2 years, we have discovered that fire setting is one of many problems and issues facing the youth of our community. As we made this discovery, the various members of our group, each with an expertise of their own has worked on approaches to address various issues from fire setting, bullying and others.

With this newsletter we hope to share with our readers information that they can use in

their practices to address these problems of youth as well as provide a network of resources in our community to work with children and families.



### Infant/Child Passenger Safety Informational Class Contributed by Roberta Ames / Monroe County Public Safety

ViaHealth offers an Infant/Child Passenger Safety Information Class each month at Rochester General Hospital. The class is taught by a certified Child Passenger Safety Technician and educates the community on the importance of proper installation of child passenger restraints in a vehi-

cle. The class also provides product safety information and child walker and gate safety.

The cost of the course is \$15 per couple. Individual insurance may cover some of the course cost.

To register call

1-877-922-LINK



## Megan's Law Contributed by Deputy Daniel Lyon / Monroe County Sheriff's Office

Megan's Law was named after Megan Kanka, a 7 year old who was victimized by a sex offender in New Jersey in 1994. The law mandates all states to create a registry of sex offenders for tracking purposes for local law enforcement agencies. In New York State this law is specifically called the Sex Offender's Registration Act. The law covers the release of information on convicted and released sex offenders. The release of the offenders personal informa-

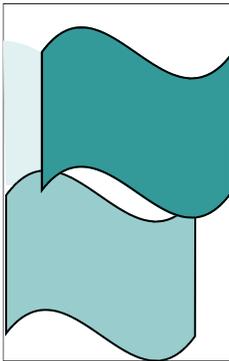


**MEGAN'S LAW**

tion can only be done if convicted of certain sex offenses. Only certain information about the offender will be released to the community based upon the risk level he/she is assigned. The local magistrate assigns the risk level after reviewing the provisions outlined by the NYS Board of Sex Offender Examiners. The Risk Levels range from 1-3 with 1 being the lowest risk and 3 being the highest. Level 1 & 2 offenders are required to register for a period of 10 years and level 3 offenders must register for a minimum of 10 years and are obligated to report to law enforcement every 90 days. Personal information on an offender can only be given to what is considered a VULNERABLE POPULATION, such as schools, day cares, etc.

For more specific information regarding risk levels, a list of the offenses that require reporting or other information about Megan's Law call 1-900-288-3838 or visit [www.criminaljustice.state.ny.us](http://www.criminaljustice.state.ny.us) or visit the Monroe County Sheriff's website at [www.monroecountysheriff.info](http://www.monroecountysheriff.info).

## Healthy Children Make Healthy Communities By M. Rick Page /Rush Henrietta



**CHILD HEALTH PLUS** is New York's free or very low cost health insurance for children from birth through age 18, who are not covered by another insurance plan. Benefits include well child

check-ups; immunizations; visits to

doctors' offices; laboratory tests and x-rays; eye care; speech and hearing services; dental care; prescription drugs; emergency medical care; inpatient hospital care; selected outpatient services; non-prescription drugs; durable medical equipment; inpatient mental health; and alcohol and substance abuse treatment.

For more information regarding income guidelines and co-payments, please call the Blue Cross Blue Shield

Customer Service Department at 585-546-3559 or 800-650-4359 or the school nurse at your child's school.



## Juvenile Fire setting Course to be Offered On-Line

Monroe County Fire Bureau staff are in the process of developing the first ever college level course to be offered on the topic of Juvenile Fire setting.

The course will be offered by Monroe Community College on line as part of the League For Innovation in the Community College/Project SAIL. At present it appears the course will be a 12-15 hour on-line course broken into

different modules and the learning will be asynchronous.

Also being looked at is the possibility of continuing education credits with the ultimate goal of turning the course into a full semester course. For more information on Project Sail, visit [www.league.org](http://www.league.org)



## Is Juvenile Fire Setting a Problem? CONTRIBUTED BY FRED RION

Unfortunately, not only is juvenile fire setting and fireplay a problem nationwide, it is also a problem here in our community. Nationally, over 65,000 fires a year are started by children at a cost of over \$260 million in property loss. Those are the fires that are reported. Research shows that it is more likely that children are responsible for nearly 300 thousand fires a year with a figure of over \$2 billion in property loss. Locally in Monroe County, between 500-600 children are seen yearly regarding juvenile fire set-

ting concerns.

So, why do children set fires? There are a number of reasons ranging from curiosity to anger, abuse/neglect to being victimized by a bully, and many others. Whatever the reason may be, each child who engages in such behaviors should be seen by a trained juvenile firesetter intervention specialist in order to educate that child appropriately on the dangers and consequences of their behavior. That officer will be able to assess what that child's motivation for setting the fire is and be able

to assist the family to find the ongoing services that they may need..

Children misusing and abusing fire is a serious and sometimes life threatening problem that should be dealt with swiftly and appropriately.

If you have a child who has engaged in the unsanctioned use of fire, no matter how seemingly insignificant the event is, contact the Monroe County Fire Bureau at 279-4050 to discuss the matter. The service is **FREE** and all information is kept confidential. (See program specific article on page 5).

## Candle Fires on the Rise (Condensed from NFPA report)

A recent report from the National Fire Protection Agency cited that home fires from candles has reached a 20-year peak and that these fires have lead to 102 deaths and over 1,400 injuries in 1999 alone. The cost of those fires totaled \$278 million in damage. The number of candle fires has risen 20% from 1998 to 1999

(the most recent year for available statistics). Candle fires are more common around the holidays, but many people also utilize candles year round, such as scented candles. The most common problems are candles being left unattended, abandoned, or inadequately controlled. Nearly 25% of the time something was left to close to the flame and often times, **children** play with

the candle or attempt to light them without adult supervision. For tips on candle safety, contact the Monroe County Fire Bureau at 279-4050 or visit NFPA on line at [www.nfpa.org](http://www.nfpa.org)

**"... FIRES FROM CANDLES HAS REACHED A 20-YEAR PEAK AND THESE FIRES HAVE LEAD TO 102 DEATHS AND OVER 1,400 INJURIES, ..."**

## Youth & Fire: Everyone has a role; Do you know your part? By Paul Schwartzman

If we are going to be effective in preventing or appropriately intervening with young people who have been involved with fireplay or fire setting behavior, we need to have everyone understand their part. So, who are the players and what is their part, check below to see if you see yourself. If not, do not feel you do not have a role, add yourself to the list and help us to script your part. **Fire Service Professionals** are often the first to identify youth involvement in fire as a first responder. They have the respect of young and old and can help to

promote community awareness and sensitivity to this concern. **Teachers, Educators & Daycare Providers** have a unique understanding of youth development and can help provide critical information to a broad range of children to prevent fire mishaps before they happen. **Parents** are truly on the front line and can model fire safe behavior, create safe environments, teach respect for fire and supervise children to insure responsible behavior. **The Media** helps to inform the public, create awareness and disseminate important information about the issues that threaten our children and how to keep them safe. **Merchants & Business Associations**

have an influence on their communities. They can establish policies to not sell unsafe materials to youth. **Law Enforcement Agencies** have the authority to investigate and help young people be accountable for their behavior. **Mental Health Professionals** help young people and families understand what motivates behavior and learn skills to make safe life decisions. **Pediatricians** can identify risk-taking behaviors and have the trust of parents and children to educate and change behavior. Finally, **Church Groups** help youth and families develop moral standards and understand how their behavior impacts others.

## Prevention Partner Profile

It was over 20 years ago that a volunteer firefighter from the Town of Irondequoit began to realize that juvenile fire setting was a problem that needed special attention. John Hall began to look at the community problem of juvenile fire setting and how to best approach it.

John began to research the issue of juvenile fire setting but found both locally and nationally, juvenile fire setting was not something that was being addressed. Fireplay was being attributed to kids being kids. So, John began to take courses in child psychol-

ogy and work closely with law enforcement and fire service regarding this problem.

John's juvenile fire setting program was first utilized by the Irondequoit Police Department. Next, the Monroe County Sheriff's Office sanctioned the program. Following that, the Monroe County Fire Bureau picked up the program as a major component of their fire prevention efforts. John's efforts and insights have truly been the catalyst for other programs around the country.

John still works tirelessly as juvenile

officer with the Monroe County Fire Bureau. He is also an Emergency Management Consultant with Bow-Mac Industries, President of the Finger Lakes Regional Burn Association and is a retired fire marshal from the University of Rochester .



## Crisis in Language Development (Condensed From Original Report )

**"... THE GROWTH SLOPE OF LANGUAGE ACQUISITION FOR 4 YEAR-OLDS APPEARS FLAT WHEN COMPARED TO STUDENTS FROM WEALTHIER HOUSEHOLDS."**

A recent study by Todd Risley, an education researcher at the University of Alaska/ Anchorage & author of *Meaningful Differences in the Lives of Young Children*

looked at the early vocabulary development in infants and toddlers. His findings showed differences between

different socioeconomic groups. Risely found that by the time children from low-income households are 4 years old, they have been exposed to nearly 40 million fewer words than their more privileged peers. Also discovered was that the "extra" talk that more-advantaged children are exposed to is usually more complex, contains more vocabulary and is filled with more positive reinforcement. These differences were found to be cumulative in that the growth slope of language acquisition for 4 year-olds ap-

pears flat when compared to students from wealthier households.

A summary of the research by Risely and collaborator Betty Hart, a professor at the University of Kansas was featured in the Spring 2003 edition of *American Educator* and the article can be found in the publications section of AFT Online at [www.aft.org](http://www.aft.org)

## Safety Council of Upstate New York Contributed by Peter Mietus /Director of Safety Council

The Safety Council is back in Rochester. The non-profit, non government regulated council has two offices, one in E. Syracuse and the other in Fairport.

The Safety Council conducts classes and meets regarding a variety of safety issues, both relating to businesses and the general public. They have formed partnerships with such organizations

as the Monroe County Sheriff's Office, American Society of Safety Engineers and OSHA to name a few.

Recent Safety Council initiatives include participating in a bike helmet fitting at Rochester General Hospital, holding defensive driving classes and featuring guest speakers at their monthly meetings. For more information about the Safety Council or if you

have questions, contact their Fairport office at (585) 223-3082 or visit them online at [www.safetycouncilny.org](http://www.safetycouncilny.org) .



## YOUTH EMERGENCY SERVICES AVAILABLE Contributed by Elizabeth Meeker, PsyD

Youth Emergency Services (YES) is a community collaborative providing rapid access to comprehensive psychiatric emergency services for children and adolescents. YES is available to youth who experience serious emotional crisis such as suicidal and/or homicidal thoughts or gestures, acute confusion, extreme agitation, self-destructive and high-risk behavior, and witness/victim of a traumatic event. Services include crisis intervention, follow-up and referral.

The Mobile Crisis Team provides crisis assessment and intervention in the home, school or community. To make a referral to the team call Life Line at 275-5151.

Crisis Specialists are located at five community mental health centers (Crestwood, Park Ridge Mental Health, Unity - Genesee St. Campus, Genesee Mental Health and Rochester Mental Health). The Crisis Specialists provide short-term crisis counseling and linkage. Youth can

be seen within 72 hours. Call the clinics directly to schedule an appointment.

Other services include emergency case management, Home Based Crisis Intervention and residential crisis beds. Community workshops on suicide prevention, violence prevention, bullying and self-injury are also available. For additional information on all YES services, please go to the website at [www.yesprogram.org](http://www.yesprogram.org) or contact Elizabeth Meeker, Psy.D., YES Program Manager at 613-7632.

## Monroe County Fire Bureau's Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Program

There have been several articles devoted to the topic of juvenile fire setting in this first edition of the newsletter. The question then arises what to do if your child has engaged in fireplay or fire setting or you are a professional within the community working with a child who has been involved with fireplay or fire setting behaviors?

It should be understood that all instances of fireplay or fire setting should be viewed as needing immediate attention. This is not because there is something wrong with the child, but rather the behavior is quite dangerous to both the child and all those

around him/her. Many children are curious about fire. Curiosity is natural and part of child development. It is how that curiosity is acted upon that needs to be addressed.

Therefore, if a child is engaging in fire setting behaviors (or has in the past), contact the Monroe County Fire Bureau's Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Program. The information shared with the Juvenile Officer from the program will be kept confidential and not shared with anyone unless authorized to do so by the parent.

Once a child is referred, a trained juvenile

officer will schedule a time to come to the family's home (at the family's convenience) to administer the education program with the child(ren), assist the family to develop a fire safety plan, and assist in securing whatever ongoing services may be needed. In many situations, the education is enough to stop the behavior.

If you have questions or would like to refer a child, contact Fred Rion at 279-4050. And remember, the program is FREE and CONFIDENTIAL.

## Child Advocacy Center to open Spring '04 Contributed by Mary Whittier



A new resource for child sexual abuse victims is anticipated to open this spring. A Child Advocacy Center (CAC) will be housed with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children/NY Branch at 275 Lake Avenue in downtown Rochester. CAC's utilize a one-stop shop

approach in providing comprehensive investigative and treatment services to children who have been sexually or physically abused. The CAC model assists children by minimizing the number of times they have to talk about the abuse scenario, and reducing the number of times they must endure physical examinations. The interdisciplinary team of child protective services, law enforcement, the District Attorney's office, mental-health professionals, medical providers and vic-

tim advocates can meet with the child in one session as opposed to the child going to a variety of settings for multiple interviews.

This newly formed organization will be the Bivona Child Advocacy Center, dedicated to Kathie and Lou Bivona, the local founders of NCMEC/NY. For more information, contact Mary Whittier, Director of the Bivona CAC at 242-0900.

## Monroe County Juvenile Fire Prevention Task Force

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c/o Monroe County Fire Bureau  
Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Program  
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Rochester, NY 14624

Phone: 585-279-4050

Fax: 585-279-4167

Email: [frion@monroecounty.gov](mailto:frion@monroecounty.gov)



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WE'RE ON THE WEB @  
[WWW.MONROECOUNTY.GOV](http://WWW.MONROECOUNTY.GOV)

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Although this newsletter is being distributed by the Monroe County Fire Bureau, there are many members of the Juvenile Fire Prevention Task Force. All of those individuals have donated time and resources to our Task Force in order to be certain that the most accurate and critical information is being shared with our community. As Chairman of the Task Force, I would like to thank all of you who have worked so hard over the last 2 years and provided their expertise to our project, not for recognition but because they care about children and our community. I look forward to working with all of you in the future. Thank you most sincerely.

Fred Rion / Task Force Chairman

## Cable Access Program to Air Soon

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The County Communications Department and the Monroe County Fire Bureau have revived efforts to inform the public about departmental activities and issues by filming a series of programs to be aired on the existing nine cable channels across the county. The programs are produced by Monroe County with outstanding technical support from **Irondequoit Community Access Television (ICAT)**.

Several programs have been taped to date and are hosted by Juvenile Fire Prevention Coordinator Fred Rion and emphasize Youth and Public Safety topics including "Bullying", "Child Sexual Abuse",

"Juvenile Fire setting" and "The Asset Approach." Additionally, eight public service announcements (PSA's) will also begin airing on juvenile safety topics such as school bus safety, bike helmet safety, and others.

If you wish to suggest additional program topics relating to Juvenile Public Safety, please contact Fred Rion at the Monroe County Fire Bureau at 279-4053 or e-mail him at [frion@monroecounty.gov](mailto:frion@monroecounty.gov).

You may also contact Bob Nolan in the Monroe County Communications office for further information about additional planned pro-

gramming in the series that includes other county departments and activities. Phone 428-2380 or e-mail him at [rnolan@monroecounty.gov](mailto:rnolan@monroecounty.gov).

