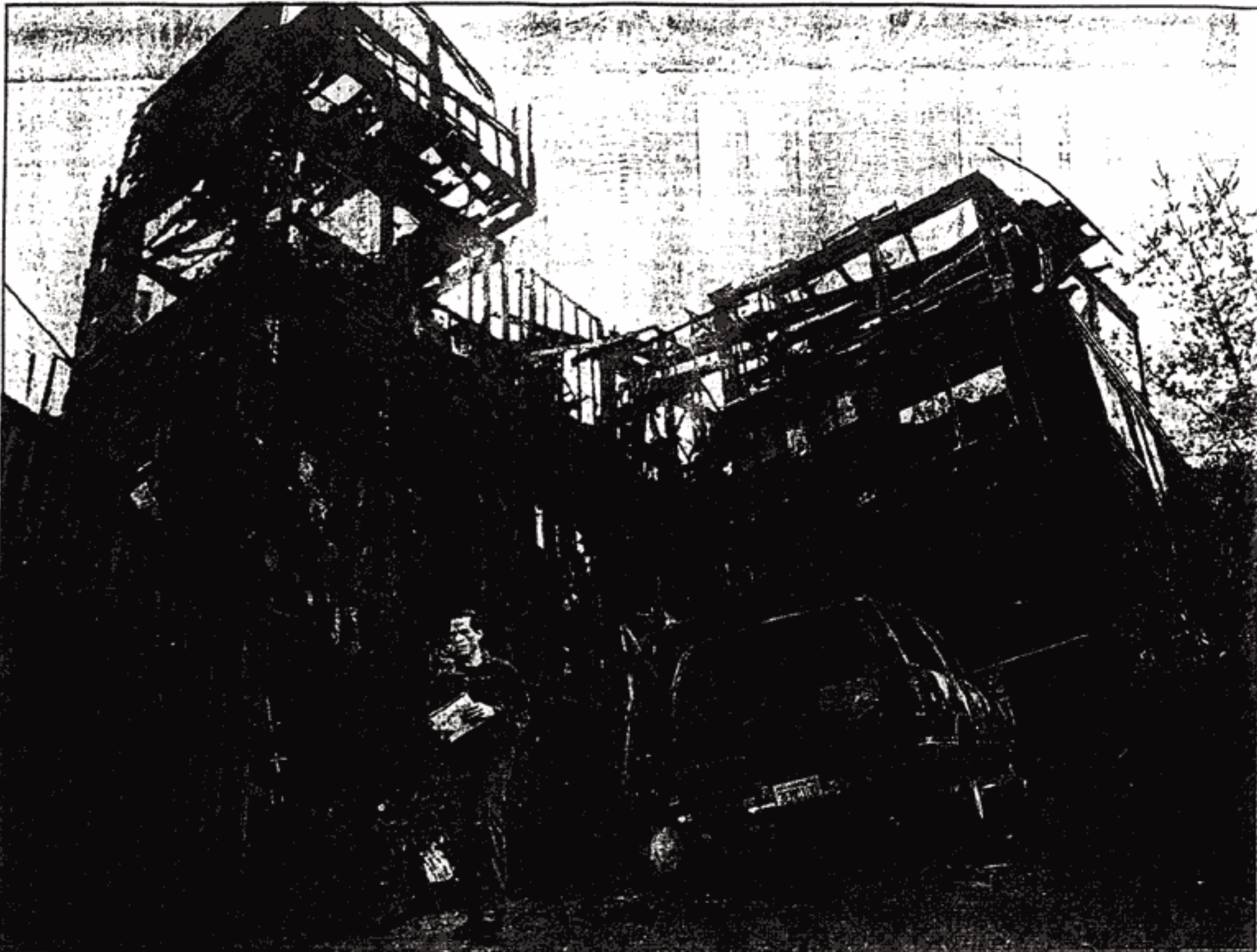


# Fast-moving fire chars hillside home



IJ photo/Marian Little Utley

**GUTTED:** Ross Valley Capt. Roger Meagor today helps investigate fire that charred this Fawn Drive home in Sleepy Hollow.

## Homeowner thankful family got out in time

By Brad Breithaupt

*Independent Journal reporter*

Michael Walton stood at the end of his driveway this morning and looked up at the charred skeleton of his hillside home in Sleepy Hollow.

"I thank my lucky stars that my wife and family are alive, everyday," he said as investigators

got ready to search for what started the blaze that ripped through Waltons' four-bedroom home at 707 Fawn Drive, near the end of the winding road.

He and his wife were awakened by the fire after 11 p.m. and were able to rush their young children and themselves unhurt out of the burning house.

Walton said the fire and smoke grew so fast he couldn't

get back in to call the fire department. The Ross Valley Fire Department received the fire call from a neighbor at 11:21 p.m.

Neighbors looked stunned at the sight of the scorched house, a \$500,000 home that was built in 1989.

Several said they were fortunate the fire occurred in the spring and not during the fire season when it could have spread

along grassy ridgeline.

The blackened frame of the home's master bedroom, perched on the fourth floor, was still smoldering even though it had been drenched by the home's fire sprinkler system and the gallons of water firefighters poured on the house.

"It probably shows the intensity of the fire, to overrun a

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# Fire

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sprinkler system," said Ross Valley firefighter Craig Carroll.

Walton and his wife, Solina, were asleep when she woke up and told him something was wrong.

"The room was glowing and I looked and saw the fire," Walter said.

They both grabbed a child, five-year-old Alex and seven-month-old Taylor. They fled out a back door because flames blocked the path to the front door.

This morning, a Subaru station-wagon, scorched inside and out,

was parked in the driveway next to a charred mound of firewood that was next to the house.

The wood studs that held up the sideyard deck looked as sturdy as burnt matchsticks.

It was the first major house fire in Ross Valley this year. Last year, two homes were heavily damaged in fires.

Fawn Drive neighbors this morning were impressed that firefighters from the Ross Valley, Ross and Marin County fire departments were able to keep the fire from spreading to other homes.

"It was just confined. It's amazing," said Virginia Taylor, who lives up the hill.

"I'm so impressed," said Nina Pigois, the next door neighbor who reported the fire.

Taylor and other neighbors said they are lucky the fire didn't occur during the summer.

"The whole hill would be gone," Taylor said.

Pigois said she called the fire department after she looked out a window and saw flames.

She looked out of a window and saw the fire.

After calling the fire department, she got her child out of her house. In those few moments, her neighbors' house was already engulfed in flames.

"By the time I got my kid out of our house, this was major," she said.

Pigois said that about a hour earlier she picked up the smell of burning electricity, but she looked outside and checked around the house and didn't see anything amiss.

Carroll said fire awareness is a top priority among Fawn Drive residents. Walton had created a fire-break around his home.

Last night's fire could have been much worse, he said.

"On a 'red flag' day, you don't want to think about it," Carroll said.