



By Jan Rahn

Managing Editor

Eight area departments joined in an effort last week to extinguish a fire that threatened Venango.

According to Venango Fire Chief Steve Tucker, 28-and-a-half acres were destroyed on the southwest edge of the village on March 12 before firefighters got it under control within approximately two hours. It burned through a yard, completely surrounded the cell phone tower and licked at the edge of house lots.

The blaze ruined some equipment and damaged other pieces belonging to Josh Jaeger that were assembled for a sale on property of Michael Wegener. Two combines were surrounded by flames but no damage was done, said Tucker. There were no structures destroyed.

Wind was a huge factor in getting the fire contained while it consumed CRP ground on its way toward town.

Praising the efforts of over 40 volunteer personnel from Venango, Grant, Madrid, Big Springs, Brule, Lamar, and Amherst and Holyoke, Colo., Tucker said, "We did a good job stopping it right where it needed to be stopped. Once people arrived we got it under control. Everyone knows how to work well together."

The good news, said Tucker, is that the fire occurred just adjacent to a blaze in mid-January that destroyed 15 acres of CRP, which leaves no more grassland along the west/southwest edge of town. "We should be good till next year!" he said.

Extreme dry conditions for several weeks has led to "Red Flag" warnings for area fire departments to be on alert to the possibility of prairie fires.

Use common sense at scene

Last week's fire on the edge of Venango was an example of county residents not using good judgment when arriving at a fire scene to watch. There were several drivers in the area which was a safety concern.

Curious passersby can place themselves and fire department personnel in danger if not alert to where trucks are or what direction the fire is traveling.

Both Sheriff Jim Brueggeman and Venango Fire Chief Steve Tucker warn the public to stay back and let the firefighters do their job on the scene.

"There are always people looking, but they need to be aware of things," said Tucker. "The last thing we need is for someone to get run over or to interfere with fire department equipment."

It's a stressful situation for firefighters and trucks are often times driving through smoke unaware there is another vehicle in the vicinity.

"It's already dangerous enough, people need to use common sense and stay out of the way," he said.