

# Preventing Tragedy

## Teens alert homeowners and firefighters about smoke.

BY BONNIE HOBBS  
CENTRE VIEW

**T**wo quick-thinking Centreville teens last weekend warned a sleeping family about a fire in their garage, preventing a dangerous situation from potentially becoming deadly.

"It was a good thing they were around," said Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Department spokesman Will Bailey. "If the kids hadn't driven by there and saw that smoke, there's no telling how far the fire would have spread."

The incident occurred early Sunday morning, around 12:15 a.m., as friends Mark Vaz of Belle Pond Farm and Philip Weinheimer of Sully Station II were returning home after Fourth of July festivities. Mark, 18, had just dropped off Philip, 19, at his house when Philip realized he'd left his wallet in Mark's car.

Mark was driving back to return it when he noticed smoke coming from the garage of a home at 5710 Deer Pond Road, also in Sully II. "So he told Philip and they drove to the home," said Philip's mom, Tina Weinheimer. "My son called 911 and banged on the door to alert the sleeping family, and Mark alerted the neighbors."

Initially, she said, Philip thought it might have been smoke from lingering fireworks. But then, said Weinheimer, "He saw smoke coming from the gutter on the roof. He was an Eagle Scout with Troop 893, and I'm very proud of him."

Equally proud is Mark's mother, Fabia Vaz. "I had called him, wondering where he was, and he didn't call me right back," she said. "Then, when he did call, he told



**Mark Vaz**



**Philip Weinheimer**

me what happened. I'm glad he stopped and went back; he's the youngest of my four children and is a really good kid."

Bailey said some 30 firefighters from both Centreville fire stations, 17 and 38, as well as from the Fair Oaks, Chantilly and Fairfax Center stations responded. He said first-arriving units encountered flames in the garage and were able to extinguish the blaze within 17 minutes.

He said a vehicle parked inside the garage had somehow caught on fire, but firefighters contained

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the fire to that vehicle. The garage sustained smoke and water damage, but the fire didn't extend to the house.

"I think the outcome would have been different, had my son not been there," said Weinheimer. "It could have been devastating. A husband, wife and three children were in the house, and they thanked him afterward. When he came home, he woke us up and said, 'I saved a family tonight.'"

Similarly, Vaz said the blaze "could have caused a lot of damage. Mark said the lady hugged him in thanks."

Agreeing with the moms, Bailey said, "If it wasn't for these kids knocking on the door and waking the people up, the fire could have been a lot worse. The family was blessed that day."

Mark Vaz is a 2009 graduate of Westfield High and will enter the Culinary Institute of America in New York this fall for training to become a professional chef. Philip Weinheimer is a 2008 Westfield grad and is a sophomore at NOVA.