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Photo by Justin Greaves

Chris Byford stands in front of the remains of his 150-year-old barn. Two hundred and fifty sheep, many of them pregnant, were lost in the barn fire Saturday on Bethel Road in Prince Edward County, causing an estimated \$400,000 in damages.

Family reeling after barn fire

Two hundred and fifty sheep casualties of fire in Prince Edward County

By Justin Greaves

Hundreds of sheep, many of them on fire, tore out of Chris Byford's burning barn early Saturday morning.

Two hundred and fifty were lost, leaving a farmer and his family having to make the difficult decision whether to continue raising livestock.

The sheep, many of them pregnant, were lost in the barn fire on Bethel Road

in Prince Edward County. The fire cost an estimated \$400,000 in damages to livestock, building and a large quantity of hay.

The call to 911 was made after farmer Chris Byford was woken up by his brother at 2 a.m. The 150-year-old barn was fully engulfed within flames in minutes.

"My first thought was, holy, I need to get the animals. I only had one leg in my pants and I came running out," said Byford, who has been living on the farm for 58 years, and farming since he took it over from his father.

The fire department was on the scene within minutes.

"The building was like a red hot iron, it was massively hot. The steel was keeping the heat in, but every opening had a fire. It's something I never want to experience again. When I opened the door, 200 sheep ran out like a bullet, some were on fire, I had to shoot them," said Byford.

For over 12 hours, 40 firefighters fought the fire, using over 90 tanker loads of water.

"The first priority when we arrived was dousing the surrounding barns so the fire doesn't spread," said Deputy Fire Chief Robert Rutter of the Prince Edward Fire Department.

Rutter said the fire is suspected to be

electrical and accidental.

On Sunday, the wind swept up, reigniting the fire again, spreading through the hay. The fire department was called and quickly put the fire out. The snow blocked the fire from being able to do any more damage. Despite the intense conditions, no one was injured the whole weekend.

The Byfords have an estimated 1,000 sheep on the farm. The 250 sheep that died were only supposed to be in the barn from Feb. 1 to 15 while in labour. Byford said he only keeps the sheep in the barn when they're pregnant. A fire sale will be held to sell 100 sheep, and the rest will

stay with his neighbour. Each sheep is worth an estimated \$400.

In late fall, Byford and his two sons put \$20,000 into the roof of the old barn in an attempt to update it.

"You can update all you want, but you have to pay big premiums if you want insurance on old barns," said Byford.

"It's funny how things happen, I'm never a sound sleeper, but that night we all slept so deeply. If it wasn't for my brother and sister-in-law, we never would have seen it," said Byford's wife Shirley.

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Photo by Kaitlin Abeele

Jacques Villeneuve and Colt Dellandrea (right) collide, coming out of the fourth turn on the oval track during the final lap of the final race in the Hastings Cup snowmobile race in Bancroft. Both riders slid across the finish line on their backs, but Villeneuve was disqualified for causing the crash, giving Dellandrea the win of the Hastings Cup.

Residents evacuated from retirement home

By James Wood

Residents from the Bel Marine Retirement residence, located in the east end of Belleville on Dundas Street, have been evacuated from their complex following an inspection by the Electrical Safety Authority.

The bright building has been cast into the dark, with ice forming on the windows and undelivered newspapers cluttering up the front steps.

According to fire prevention officer Norm Mitts of the Belleville Fire Department, the ESA inspection found too many discrepancies in the building's electrical systems for the residence to continue operating safely, and the occupants of the 110-bed retirement home were evacuated to other sites across Belleville. Mitts also said that power to the residence has been cut off by the ESA.

Homes, hotels and other residences have taken up the responsibility of sheltering the former Bel Marine occupants as they wait for the power in their home to be restored.

Half of the fourth floor of the Belleville Travelodge has been used to house the former residents of Bel Marine. An impromptu nurse's office has been set up in the middle hotel room, with the door open and the nurse on watch.

It is not clear how long the seniors will be living in the hotel. One of the owners, Raj Uthaya, told the Pioneer that he had hoped to have residents back into Bel Marine by today, only to have that timeframe change as the situation continued to develop.

According to Mitts, in order to restore power to the building, contractors will have to be called in and a period of repairs will have to be undertaken.

The repairs required could take some time, he said, which will continue to delay the return of the homes occupants.

Staff at the Travelodge said the reservation for the Bel Marine group extends for a few more weeks.

Hastings Cup battle ends in crash

Jacques Villeneuve among racers at weekend event

By Kaitlin Abeele

It wasn't the way Colt Dellandrea wanted to win Sunday's Hastings Cup, sliding across the finish line on his back, his Arctic Cat snowmobile crashed 100 feet behind him.

"This race was one of the best of my life, battling with Jacques Villeneuve. For it to end this way is kinda rough."

Dellandrea had been trailing first-place rider Villeneuve until the third turn on the final lap of the oval ice ring in Bancroft.

Dellandrea took the inside track in the turn and passed Villeneuve going into the final turn before the finish line. It looked like Dellandrea would win the race.

Villeneuve tried to take Dellandrea on the outside track coming out of the final turn. In a split second, both snowmobiles were spinning out of control, then both riders were airborne.

They slid across the finish line on their backs, Villeneuve's snowmobile scrapping across the ice in between them.

Villeneuve crossed the line first, but was disqualified for causing the crash.

This meant Dellandrea had won the Hastings Cup. It may not have been how he wanted it to end, but it was

'This race was one of the best of my life, battling with Jacques Villeneuve. For it to end this way is kinda rough.'

Racer Colt Dellandrea

still a win.

"But at least I know I would have beat him clean and this is my first pro win, so it means a lot," said Dellandrea.

The final race had been delayed and restarted after a crash between Andrew Darraugh and Mike Van Dolder, halfway through the first lap. Van

Dolder dragged down the straight-away on his back underneath Darraugh's snowmobile.

Van Dolder was removed from the track on a stretcher in an ambulance, but was responsive.

This was the first year that Bancroft hosted the Hastings Cup. It hosted the Madawaska Cup three years ago, which used to be hosted every year in Bancroft during the '70s.

Vaughn Lloyd was a race official for the event and the main organizer for the weekend-long competition this year. He said that calling a winner before the final race is impossible since the races can be so unpredictable.

"It's anyone's guess. You can have a breakdown or an accident, and it switches. The speeds are pretty high. Anything can happen," said Lloyd.