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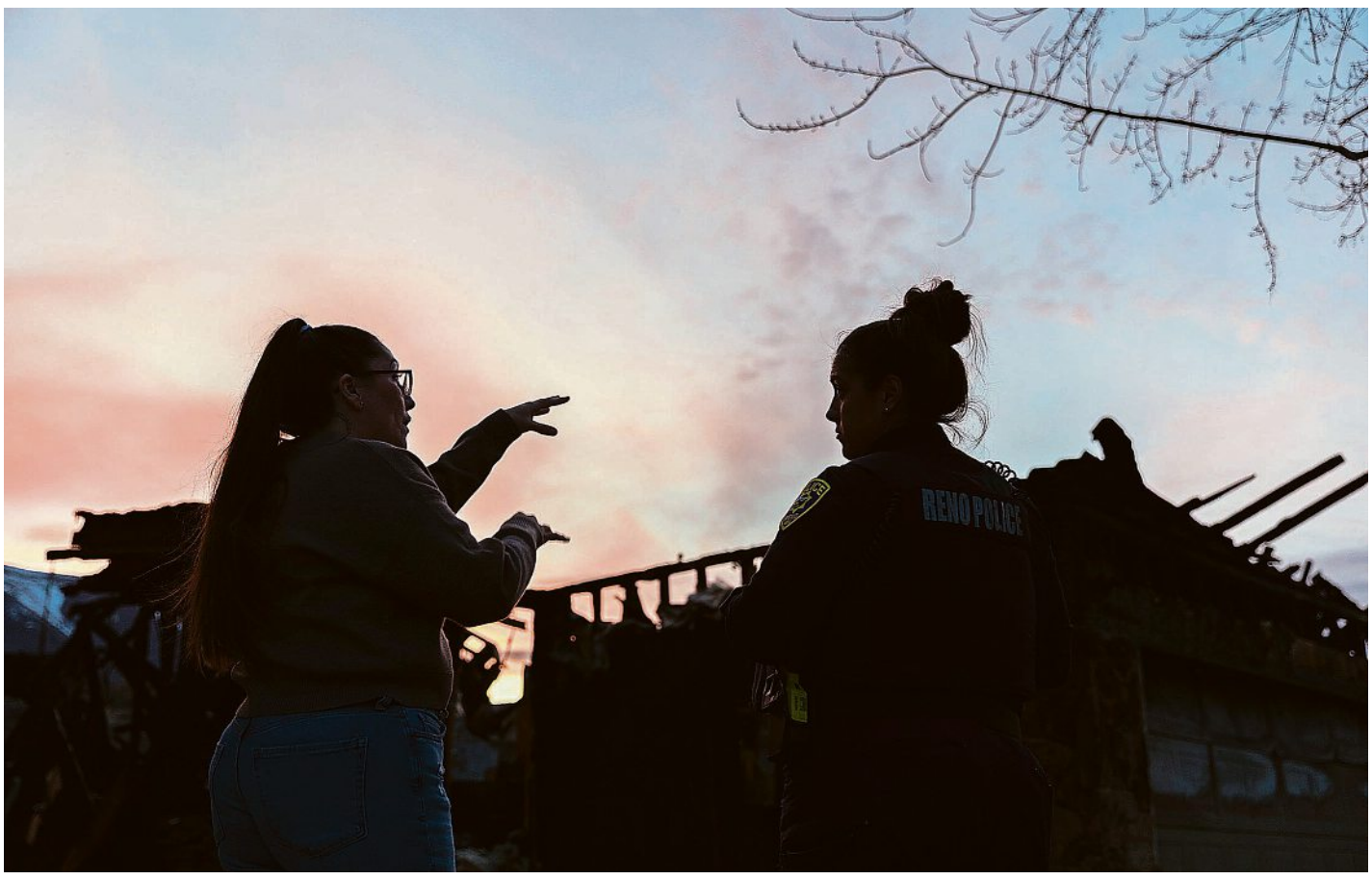
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'Everything just came out'



Vanessa Tillinghast and Reno police officer Lara Hyde look at a house in Tillinghast's neighborhood that was burnt from a wildfire on Nov. 4, after Hyde saved her children from her home in Reno. ABRA RICHARDSON/RGJ

Reno officer rescues brothers as wildfire races toward them

Siobhan McAndrew
Reno Gazette Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

The first sign something was terribly wrong came when Vanessa Tillinghast's son called to say the power was out.

The Reno mom and her daughter, Jocelyn, 13, had just left Meadowood Mall after exchanging a pair of new school shoes for a half-size larger.

She left her oldest son, Isaiah, 18, at home with his two younger brothers, Blake, 15, and Brandon, 13.

The single mother briefly panicked for the wrong reason — had she forgotten to pay the power bill? With her three youngest children on the autism spectrum, including two who are nonverbal, keeping up with everything was sometimes overwhelming.

The fire burning near Verdi, miles from her three-bedroom home off Stead Boulevard in the North Valleys, barely crossed her mind.

"I just thought, 'That's odd the power is out,'" she said.

Tillinghast had no idea the Hawk Fire, which started around 11:30 a.m. Saturday, Aug. 22, would hours later

See RESCUE, Page 3A



Vanessa Tillinghast stands with her childen outside her home in the North Valleys. From left: Brandon, Vanessa, Jocelyn, Blake and Isaiah. SIOBHAN MCANDREW/RGJ

Hawk Fire rescue leads to emotional reunion months later

Siobhan McAndrew
Reno Gazette Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

When Vanessa Tillinghast shared with the Reno Gazette Journal her story about the night of the Hawk Fire, she had one hope.

She wanted to find the police officer who saved her children.

For weeks after the fire tore through Reno, destroying 47 homes, Tillinghast thought about the woman she interacted with for just a few moments.

She scrolled through the Reno Police Department's social media pages, zooming in on photos and studying blurry faces, wondering whether one belonged to the officer who stopped when so many others could not.

"I just want to know her name," Tillinghast said.

Trapped by fire

On Aug. 22, Tillinghast and her daughter, Jocelyn, left home to exchange a pair of new school shoes.

Back at the family's home off Stead Boulevard, her 18-year-old son, Isaiah,

See REUNION, Page 4A

Bat cave, arch can be seen just off U.S. 50

Mark Robison
Reno Gazette Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Nevada's U.S. Highway 50 — famously called the Loneliest Road in America — contains many little-known gems because of its isolation.

If you know where to look, one unmarked dirt road leads to two rarely visited sights sitting side by side: Rose Guano Bat Cave and Osceola Arch in White Pine County, near the Spring Valley Wind Farm.

There's no sign telling travelers where to turn — just a narrow, rough dirt track at mile marker 76.

Visitors can drive to within about a quarter mile, then hike the rest of the way. Along the route are old firepits and rusted tin cans left from workers who mined guano — bat droppings — for fertilizer more than a century ago.

Because the guano is in a cave on a cliff face, miners found it easier to blast an "adit" — horizontal tunnel — under the bat poop to get it out.

Now when bats leave the cave at dusk, they break a laser beam that signals nearby turbines at the wind farm to slow down, helping reduce bat deaths.

"Each bat consumes between 200 and 600 insects a night, selecting mainly moths, but also eating beetles, flying ants and leafhoppers," says a government wildlife sign on site. "A colony this size consumes approximately 20 tons of insects nightly."

Rose Guano Cave can host hundreds of thousands of bats during fall migration.

Just steps away is Osceola Arch, disguised as just a big rock when

See LONELIEST ROAD, Page 2A

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