

Multiple fire crews fight flames at Knob Hill Park

By **Jim Herr** - April 23, 2018



Multiple fire crews, including some from surrounding towns and the Buffalo Airport, were called to help put out a massive brush fire on April 23rd inside Knob Hill Park in Cleveland Hill's Fire District. (Jim Herr/Cheektowaga Chronicle)

CHEEKTOWAGA – Multiple fire crews, including some from surrounding towns and the Buffalo Airport, were called to help put out a massive brush fire at Knob Hill Park late Monday afternoon in Cleveland Hill's Fire District.

The fire was described as being 400'x400' by a first arriving fire chief. Its smoke was seen more than a mile away by airport flight controllers in the tower. Cleveland Hill Fire Department's 1st Assistant Chief David Spahr says they were one of the many initial 911 callers.

"We didn't know if it was a structure fire at the time. When we pulled up on scene we realized we had a huge brush fire – first one of the year," said Mr. Spahr.

The dry high grass along with knocked down brush and trees fueled the massive fire which Mr. Spahr described as something only firefighters on the west coast normally see. The unusual location of the fire – around 200' away from any road and water source – made fighting the fire a challenge.

"We don't have the proper equipment to get in and out of here so we had to call multiple agencies in to help," said Mr. Spahr. The airport fire department sent an airport crash tender to help. "Their truck has a pretty good size deck gun for incident reach and obviously the mobility, it can go offroad a little bit so that definitely helped us get the fire under control."

Patrick Gleiser was eating his dinner inside his Redleaf Lane home when he saw what he describes as a bonfire spreading fast.

"Instantly, within seconds. It was going crazy depending on which way the wind was blowing. It was all the way to the right and then all the way to the left right by our house," said Mr. Gleiser.



An airport crash tender assisted at the Knob Hill Park brush fire on April 23rd. (Jim Herr/Cheektowaga Chronicle)

He could only watch and wait as the fire inched closer to his home and the homes of his neighbors. The fire stopped 12 feet short of his garage. "It's a little disappointing. It took almost 10-15 minutes before they put something on the fire," added Mr. Gleiser.

At the time of the fire, Cleveland Hill and Pine Hill firefighters were [fighting a fire inside a shed on Tutor Road](#) on the other side of the fire district. A U-Crest fire chief and fire engine just made it to the scene of the shed fire after being dispatched for mutual aid. They went to investigate the brush fire.

"The time of the day with the manpower – we had a little bit of an issue with timing, but all and all we saved everything that we put the water on," said Mr. Spahr.

He added that it's very unusual for his department to be working two fires at once.

Ashley Capitano tells Cheektowaga Chronicle that she saw three different fires in the brush from her Redleaf Lane home.

"It all just spread and kept going," said Ms. Capitano. "I was scared that it was all going to move forward and come towards our house."

Neighbor Debbie Worley feels the fire is suspicious.

"I saw three kids back there around 3 o'clock," said Ms. Worley. "There are kids back here all the time."

There was no apparent cause Monday evening according to Mr. Spahr.

"Possibly dry conditions, for as much rain as we have had the ground is still kind of dry. The cause is unknown at this time," said Mr. Spahr.

Detectives from the Cheektowaga Police Fire Investigation Unit were on scene.

