

## Family escapes unharmed

# Wendouree house fire

By Benjamin Preiss

A FAMILY home in Wendouree was gutted after it was engulfed in flames early yesterday morning.

Four fire units were called to the Conniston Street home about 2.40am and brought the blaze under control within 30 minutes.

Nobody was injured and fire crews did not request an ambulance.

At least three people were

inside the house when a bedroom caught fire.

Firefighters believe an electric blanket may have caused the inferno.

One of the occupants, who declined to be named, said the family was lucky to escape unhurt.

"This is bad but it's replaceable... we all got out safely," she said.

Several cars parked in the driveway were also damaged by the fire.

Neighbour Graeme Beaston was woken early yesterday morning by his dog scratching at the back door and saw the fire had already taken hold.

"When I went out the door all I could see was red (flames)," he said. "By the time the fire brigade got here there was a lot of smoke."

"I actually got the hose and put it over the fence and tried to extinguish some of the flames."

Minutes later glass windows at the back of the house began breaking, Mr Beaston said.

Mr Beaston's wife called the fire brigade but the family may also have contacted emergency services.

Fire units from Ballarat City and Wendouree were called to the fire and left the scene about two hours later.

The house was equipped with smoke detectors.



**GUTTED:** A Wendouree home was gutted in a fire yesterday morning but luckily no one was injured.

## Happy feet just love to dance

By Dellaram Jamali

MADELYN Rothe was three years old when she started dancing.

"I love dancing. It's lots of fun and you feel like you're free. It's really lovely," the now 11-year-old said.

The Anita Coutts School of Dance student competed in yesterday's classical solo division 2 in the Royal South Street Competition.

Having competed in five previous competitions, Madelyn showed no signs of nervousness as she prepared to enter the stage.

With two awards from the previous year under her belt, she was hoping for the best.

Her two friends, from the same school, were among 18 competitors from around the region who competed in the section.

Twelve-year-old Georgia Ballinger said she enjoyed dancing in the competition.

"I'm looking forward to the day. I like being with friends and being able to entertain people," Georgia said.

Artistic director of the pair's school Anita Coutts-Delaland said she was sure her students would do their best on stage as they made the most out of their South Street experience.



**SHOW GOES ON:** Sarah Perkins, Madelyn Rothe, both 11, and Georgia Ballinger, 12, prepare to compete in the Royal South Street classical solo competition yesterday. Picture: Lachlan Bence

## Support for Oprah visit gathers momentum

SUPPORT for billionaire television host Oprah Winfrey to visit Ballarat continues to grow.

The Facebook page "Bring Oprah to Ballarat", set up by *The Courier*, has attracted more than 200 fans.

Although details of Ms Winfrey's plans are yet to be released, there is a growing line of people encouraging her to visit the city.

The US Consulate General of Melbourne and the managing director of Tourism Australia have previously thrown their hats into the ring, spruiking Ballarat's attractions.

Donna Neilson also pledged her support on Facebook.

"I find her as a role model for us younger generation. She's changed a lot of people's lives, to bring her to

[www.thecourier.com.au](http://www.thecourier.com.au)

Visit our website to join our campaign and help bring Oprah to Ballarat.

Ballarat, she would change many more!" she posted.

Julia Leonard encouraged her to enjoy the wildlife in Ballarat.

"As far as attractions go, Oprah would definitely enjoy roaming amongst the friendly roos at the wildlife park and cuddling up to a koala and her joey," she said.

Oprah's final travel arrangements will not be made clear for some time. She is expected to arrive in December but her movements in Victoria remain uncertain.

## Gang email a cyber hoax

THE content of an email warning residents about a gang of murderers and thieves in the Ballarat region is untrue.

Ballarat Police has issued a statement about the falseness of the message which has been circulating around Ballarat over the last few days.

The email describes different methods in which thieves are supposedly deceiving women in the region before raping and leaving them for dead.

Detective Senior Constable Brett Robinson

said police had been contacted by several people inquiring about the truth of the email.

"We just want to let the public know that there is no reported crimes that have occurred in the circumstances described," Detective Senior Constable Robinson said.

"There is no need for people to panic. There is no truth to it at all."

He believed the email was a prank but said it was not considered a criminal offence. Government agencies are believed to be a major target of the message.

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