



The Mansion at Ebo Hill, which Richard Albano had hoped to restore to its 19th century glory, goes up in flames Monday evening.

# Fire destroys his plans to restore 1845 mansion

BY JOHN VALENTI  
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Richard Albano was beside himself Tuesday.

The night before, the historic Smithtown mansion he had bought just weeks earlier—and was renovating—went up in flames.

Ebo Hill, which dated to 1845 and was once owned by the family that founded Smithtown, was so damaged that it had to be razed, Suffolk County police and fire officials said. The cause of the fire is being investigated by the county and Smithtown.

Early Tuesday, Albano said he was too emotional to talk much over the phone about the fire but he had posted his thoughts on Facebook. “I’m not doing this now,” he said in a brief phone interview. “I’m just too devastated.”

In his post on “The Mansion at Ebo Hill” page, Albano said a worker who was in the home discovered the fire about 8 p.m. The 11,094-square-foot house had 16 bed-

rooms and sat on 3.2 acres on Edgewood Avenue.

The worker said “he was in the rear of the home when he heard a loud ‘pop’ coming from the front of the home,” Albano wrote. “He went towards the front and saw that the fireplace mantle was on fire.” The worker put out the flames, according to the post, then found the second floor on fire.

In the phone interview, Albano said there were embers in the fireplace when he left Monday night, but there was “a screen on it and it was closed” so he didn’t give it another thought.

Albano said the renovation had taken the walls down, mostly to the studs, and all the interior doors had been removed.

“It came to us as a fully engulfed structure fire,” said Jeff Bressler, a spokesman for the Smithtown Fire Department. “We didn’t even try to get inside.”

A neighbor, Joseph Esposito, 64, said he was in his home office when he noticed

traffic backing up on Edgewood Avenue. He walked outside and saw the fire.

“There were flames, shooting up above the trees,” he said Tuesday afternoon. “It was shocking because all those years, 10 years of living there, the house was vacant. And nothing ever happened to it. This guy tries to restore it, and all of a sudden there’s this. It’s a shame.”

Responding were firefighters from Smithtown, St. James, Nesconset, Kings Park, Hauppauge and Nissequogue, as well as crews from Commack Volunteer Ambulance and Central Islip-Hauppauge Ambulance, Smithtown spokeswoman Nicole Gargiulo said.

The fire was brought under control shortly before 10:30 p.m., Gargiulo said, and a few small fires were extinguished by about 1 a.m.

“I thank God that no one was hurt, including the worker and the hundreds of volunteer firefighters that came to help,” Albano wrote on Facebook.

Earlier Monday, firefight-

ers had been called to the property to put out a small fire in a trash container that was not near the home.

The previous owner, Richard Longobardi, told Newsday: “I feel awful, absolutely terrible. But nobody got hurt, thank God. It is what it is.”

Longobardi and his wife bought the home in 2001 for \$650,000, according to property records. When Newsday reported the sale to Albano earlier this month, both Albano and Longobardi declined to give the sale price or discuss renovation costs. The real estate website Trulia estimated the value of the home at about \$2 million.

The mansion’s owners have included several generations of the family that founded Smithtown, including Ethelbert Smith, who worked in the China tea trade in the mid-19th century, and his son, Richard Lawrence Smith, who was prominent in yachting and horse circles in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

With Deborah Morris

## Census question draws ire

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Trump administration’s decision to ask people about their citizenship in the 2020 census set off worries among Democrats on Tuesday that immigrants would dodge the survey altogether, diluting political representation for states that tend to vote Democratic and robbing many communities of federal dollars.

Not since 1950 has the census collected citizenship data from the whole population, rather than just a population sample, says the Congressional Research Service. The decision to restore the question after decades prompted an immediate lawsuit from California and moves by other states with large immigrant populations to engage in a legal fight.

The decennial population count is more than an academic exercise. It’s required by the Constitution and is used to determine the number of seats each state has in the House of Representatives, and how federal money is distributed to local communities.

The political stakes of undercounting segments of the population are high.

Several states that have slowing population growth or high numbers of immigrants, such as California, New York, Illinois, Massachusetts and Ohio, are typically at risk of losing House seats when their congressional districts are redrawn every 10 years — depending on how fully their residents are counted.

California struck quickly. Attorney General Xavier Becerra filed a federal lawsuit Tuesday that seeks to block Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross’ decision to add the citizenship question. New York and New Jersey were also planning lawsuits. Massachusetts signaled interest, too.

“California simply has too much to lose to allow the Trump administration to botch this important decennial obligation,” Becerra said.

The Justice and Commerce Departments argue, in essence: Enforcing voting rights requires more data on the voting-age population of citizens than current surveys provide.

A bill sponsored by Rep. Carolyn Maloney (D-N.Y.) would block adding the citizenship question, or any major design change, without a certain level of research and testing, but with no Republicans signing on, it faces dim prospects.

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