

★ Fire guts historic home

Ebo Hill mansion in Smithtown was to be renovated

BY DEBORAH S. MORRIS
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A Smithtown home dating to 1845 and once owned by generations of the town's founding family burned to the studs Monday night, the former owner said.

Suffolk County police said they received a call at 7:56 p.m. Monday regarding a house fire on Edgewood Avenue in Smithtown.

The Ebo Hill mansion at 227 Edgewood Ave. was to undergo a major renovation, which was to return it to "look like it did the day it was new," then-prospective owner Richard Albano told Newsday earlier this month.

Albano, of Deer Park, bought the 11,094-square-foot home on 3.2 acres. When reached on his cellphone Monday night, Albano said he could not talk.

The home had previously belonged to Richard Longobardi, who said the fire had started in



The Ebo Hill mansion, at 227 Edgewood Ave., in Smithtown, burned down. ■ Video: newsday.com/suffolk

the mantle above the fireplace in the study and the mansion was completely destroyed.

He said the sale had gone through two weeks ago.

"I feel awful, absolutely terrible. But nobody got hurt, thank God. It is what it is," Longobardi said, adding that the wood in the house was 250 years old.

Newsday reported Longob-

ardi and his wife had bought the home in 2001 for \$650,000, records showed.

The mansion, which had fallen into decline, had 16 bedrooms, a towering portico and 48 acres of woodland.

The home's owners include several generations of the Smiths, the town's founding family: 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, and did brisk business in World War I shipping horses to Allied forces in Europe.

The blaze is under investigation, police said.

SCHOOLS CHIEF'S LEAVE EXTENDED

BY KESHIA CLUKEY
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The Hempstead Board of Education on Monday extended the administrative leave of district Superintendent Shimon Waronker through June 1.

The board during a special meeting voted to extend the superintendent's paid leave, which was set to end April 1, in response to a change in the date of the hearing for Waronker's legal case against the board and district. On Friday, U.S. Magistrate Steven Locke at federal court in Central Islip granted the request of Waronker, moving a hearing on his case from Monday to April 30, according to a court document.

The "delay is preventing the district from completing its investigations of his involvement in several areas of inquiry and from gathering information" regarding the notice of claim, according to the resolution read aloud after an executive session. Board members Randy Stith, LaMont Johnson and David Gates voted in favor of the measure. Board president Maribel Touré voted against the it and board vice president Gwendolyn Jackson abstained.

"In my opinion the investigation is being handled the wrong way, and every extension that we do only [adds] unnecessary expenses on the back of the taxpayers," Touré said.

Gates said: "The extension of this particular administrative leave of absence was based on Dr. Waronker's unavailability of his counsel. It's not based on anyone trying to receive additional information" or utilizing or abusing taxpayer dollars.

The board last week ordered Waronker to attend a Monday hearing on his proposed lawsuit; otherwise it would be deemed "gross insubordination."

Feds: 'I Love NY' signs going down

BY LISA IRIZARRY
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Next month, the state will begin taking down the more than 500 "I Love NY" signs that have drawn their share of haters since going up on Long Island and elsewhere, a federal official said Monday.

"NYSDOT will begin removing the signs next month," Federal Highway Administration spokesman Doug Hecox said Monday, referring to the state Department of Transportation. He said the work was originally scheduled for March but was delayed because of snowstorms.

However, DOT spokesman Joe Morrissey on Monday said no "immediate" plans had been made as the agency continues talks with the Highway Administration to "identify the best possible resolution to this matter."

The sign removal would potentially end a controversy dating to 2013 when the Highway Adminis-



An "I Love NY" sign on the Meadowbrook Parkway in Nassau County.

tration denied the state's request to put them up and Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo announced the next year that the sign campaign was starting anyway. But there may be other roadblocks ahead.

DOT officials had earlier said signs may be part of a new tourism campaign — a move that may draw the attention of federal officials who said the

original signs were illegal. They said the signs didn't adhere to laws requiring such markers provide navigational information to motorists and contained too much information, distracting drivers. Local officials and residents also said the blue and white signs were "ugly" and "useless" and ruined the aesthetics of the landscape.

On Long Island, where 144 of the 514 signs were placed at a cost of \$8.1 million, the markers can be found on the Meadowbrook, Wantagh and Northern State parkways, the Long Island Expressway, Jones Beach, Long Island MacArthur Airport and on local streets in Montauk, Port Jefferson and Orient.

Some of the signs in Montauk, Port Jefferson and Orient were taken down by the DOT last year in response to complaints.

DOT officials announced on Feb. 2 that all of the remaining signs would be taken down to make way for a new tourism campaign and signage — a day after Highway Administration acting Administrator Brandye Hendrickson sent a letter to DOT and New York State Thruway Authority officials, saying the federal government would withhold an estimated \$14 million from the nearly \$1 billion it gives New York annually for bridge and highway improvements.