



OFFICER'S ERRANT SHOT AT DEER UPSETS RESIDENTS.(LOCAL).*The Buffalo News (Buffalo, NY)* (Feb 8, 2005): pB3. (579 words)

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Byline: Thomas J. Dolan - NEWS NORTHTOWNS BUREAU

Three days after an errant shot fired from a nearby woods struck their home, a young Amherst couple are still shaken by the thought of what could have happened.

Amherst police say that one of their officers -- a marksman who is taking part in the town's bait and shoot program to control deer -- fired the round and that the shot ricocheted before hitting the house.

But that's not good enough for residents of San Fernando Lane, where the bullet landed in the second-floor guest room of a young family's home.

"In my opinion they should not have been anywhere this close to a house," said a woman who lives in the house struck by the bullet. She agreed to an interview Monday on the condition that her name and address not be published.

"When it happens, your instinctive reaction is to be outraged. We felt that at the time and still do," she said.

At about 10:30 a.m. Friday, her husband was working in a first-floor room of the house and the couple's son was staying home from grade school because of illness, she said.

The bullet blew a baseball size hole in their upstairs guest room window and lodged in a picture on the wall.

Amherst police came to the house, and they were "extremely cooperative and extremely sensitive and sympathetic" about the incident, she said, but she added that nobody should be shooting a weapon that close to a house.

Police told her the officer involved was several hundred yards away in the woods, aiming down at a deer from a platform when the round struck something and was diverted toward the houses on San Fernando Lane.

Over the weekend, her husband took a walk into the woods and said it was "not that far."

"If there's a chance of a fluke, they shouldn't be there," the woman said.

According to the town's online map system, the woods are located between Casey and North French roads, covering an area about 1,000 yards long and about 600 yards wide at the midpoint. The map also shows there are houses on three sides of the woods, the nearest of which are located about 300 yards or less from the center of the woods.

According to the woman, her neighbors are aware of the incident and they are "very interested in what's happening." As for her son, she said, it has been "difficult to explain" to him what

happened.

Assistant Police Chief Ronald H. Hagleberger told Town Board members Monday that the bait and shoot program will remain suspended until the department concludes its noncriminal investigation of the incident in about three weeks.

Police were withholding the names of the officer who fired the round and the owners of the home that was struck.

Several Town Board members also expressed support for the program to control Amherst's deer-vehicle accidents, which totaled 511 last year. The program is being done in North Tonawanda and Clarence and is being considered by Cheektowaga officials.

"I don't want to have this unfortunate incident stop the program," Amherst Council Member William L. Kindel said, calling the incident "one in a million."

But Council Member Daniel J. Ward disagreed, saying the bait and shoot program is "an accident waiting to happen," because Amherst is not a rural community.

Program officials said they would continue nonlethal attempts to control deer herds during the suspension period.

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