

Man rescues classrooms from fire

Darryl Aveoganna saved six Alak School elementary classrooms from the fire which destroyed the high school in Wainwright Sept. 23.

Aveoganna, 31, has been the North Slope Borough Airport land field operator for about one month.

Using a D8 caterpillar, Aveoganna drove through flames of fire and live wires to knock down the hallway connecting the six elementary classrooms to the high school section.

"The cat was not too good, but I made it run," he said. "I got stuck but

managed to pull out. Then when the roof fell on the cat as I was driving through, I really had to work hard, using all the power and gears the cat had."

Amidst the flames and smoke,
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• Quick response, courage

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Aveoganna said he closely watched the men who were giving him signals both in front and in back of him. The signals were directions on which way he should maneuver the cat. It took Aveoganna about 20 minutes to separate the remaining six elementary classrooms from the fire by bulldozing his way through.

Although Aveoganna continued to help put out the disastrous fire until 5 a.m., he reported to his job promptly at 8:30 a.m. Ida Panik, NSB village coordinator in Wainwright, said she would have understood if he did not show up for work the next morning.

"With only three hours of sleep, they reported to work at 8:30 a.m.," she said. "I am so proud of them!"

David Panik, an elder in Wainwright, recently stated during a public meeting where schooling alternatives for Wainwright children were discussed that Aveoganna was there because of prayer.

"Someone was praying at the time of the fire. This man was used by God to answer that prayer," Panik said. "He is commended for his quick response and courage for what he did."

Aveoganna and his wife Ida have five children, Lilly Hazel, Ronald, Isabelle, Rodney and Darryl.



Quick action by Darryl Aveoganna saved the elementary classrooms at right