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Six cats recovering after electrical fire

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No injuries, but Angel remains elusive

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An electrical fire so traumatized Angel that she remains out of reach in the burned house's basement ceiling. Meanwhile, her feline siblings are recovering in temporary homes.

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Angel was one of six cats caught in a fire in Crownsville early Monday morning. Firefighters were able to rescue Rusty, Smoky, Nick and Jack from the house. The nonprofit Dogs Finding Dogs had to be called to the scene to locate the other two - Angel and Raven. The Baltimore County organization is made up of canine search teams who travel around the region to help people locate lost pets.

"They were all a little scared and tattered, but they're all fine," said resident Rick Davis, whose ex-wife called and alerted him to the fire. He owns Raven and was providing foster care to the other cats. "I can't say enough about that group and what they did, and what amazing dogs they have."

Shortly before 6 a.m., county fire received a call about the one-alarm fire on the 1000 block of Dockster Road in Crownsville. No one was home at the time and the one-story home had flames coming from the rear. While extinguishing the blaze, the firefighters located four cats. Two had to be revived with oxygen. The fire caused \$30,000 worth of damage, Division Chief Michael Cox said.

Cats "R" Us, which had provided the foster cats, responded to the scene. When some animals were missing, the organization called K9 Search and Rescue and Dogs Finding Dogs. Anne Wills, executive director of the latter agency, came with her dog, Heidi, along with two teams that consisted of retired firefighter Dick Briggs and his dog, Jean, and Christine Rogas and her dog, Keelah.

The dogs are trained to sniff a pet's items to get its scent, then locate the missing animal. Heidi smelled the cats' scratching post and bed, then led Wills through all areas of the house that the cats had been in. Heidi also went into the family room area of the basement and indicated that there was something up high, like in the rafters of the ceiling, Wills said. They went from room to room, but Wills could not find anything.

Outside, Briggs' dog, Jean, ran toward the woods in the backyard until reaching a shed. Jean, Keelah and eventually Heidi sniffed at the ground under the shed, indicating that a pet was there. Neighbors told Wills that a cat had been in there howling, but they were unable to get it out. The group planned to block off the shed's entrances except one and set a raccoon trap nearby. Before they could set up, Davis came over and called the cat, and Raven emerged and went to his owner. He had already found the other cat - Angel - in the basement ceiling after seeing his tail hanging down.

Raven was traumatized from the experience. The cat started scratching and biting Davis as they headed back to the house, likely because of memories of the fire, Wills said.

"(Davis) was so grateful and he couldn't thank us enough. It was such a reward for us to be successful," said Wills, a Linthicum resident. "He was pretty attached to them. He had them for a while and he certainly loved them."

Davis has been told it will take about six months for the house to be livable again. Until then, Raven is staying with a friend, while Rusty, Smoky, Nick and Jack are with other foster families. Angel remains in the basement ceiling and will be placed in foster care after that. She has been elusive, but the disaster relief company that is helping pack up the house has spotted her.

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