

## [Haffner family 'overwhelmed' by donations after Buckland fire](#)

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BUCKLAND — Donations are pouring in online and at Buckland-Shelburne Elementary School for a family of four whose home was destroyed in a fire Saturday night on Charlemont Road.

“It’s overwhelming,” said Grant Haffner, whose family was renting the house at 126 Charlemont Road. “I’m so grateful, I don’t know what to say. There’s so much love and support coming, it makes the catastrophe not feel like you have to focus on it because you’re getting so much help and love, and people are constantly checking in.”

In addition to the clothing, books and blankets that have been dropped off at the glass vestibule at Buckland-Shelburne Elementary School, more than \$32,000 has been raised to date via a GoFundMe organized by Ariel Brooks and Sage Franetovich.

Grant’s partner, Cassandra Haffner, said clothing donations have been coming in “by the carload.”

“We’re incredibly grateful,” she said. “We’re humbled with gratitude. ... Our emotions are overwhelming, but the sheer volume of support is just mind-blowing in the best way.”

‘We lost everything’

On Saturday night, the couple’s daughter, Phoenix, 9, was first to notice the fire. She ran to alert Cassandra, who was sorting through Christmas gifts at the time. Cassandra told Phoenix to wake up her brother, Griffin, 11, and to grab the house landline.

“While [Phoenix] had been doing those things, I was quickly trying to put the fire out and assess if I could deal with this, which I very quickly came to the conclusion I could not, and what we had to do was get out of the house,” she recalled. “Both of my kids are so brave and their resiliency is bolstering my resiliency and Grant’s resiliency.”

Grant, who was out of state caring for his mother at the time, said he felt helpless — but he knew his family was out of the house and in the company of volunteers. The American Red Cross provided the family with essentials and the three Haffners spent the night at a neighbor’s house.

Most importantly, he said, “everyone is totally safe,” including the family’s two cats, Hermione and Pine Needle.

“We’re all just very grateful,” Grant said. “It’s harder on the kids; they just want to go back to their bedroom, but they’ll be OK.”

According to Fire Chief Herb Guyette, multiple area departments responded at around 10:20 p.m., with tankers and a few engines. After extinguishing the fire — which was the result of combustibles, such as cloth or kindling, being placed too close to a wood stove — authorities deemed the one-story, wood-frame house a “total loss.” A Hyundai Sonata that was parked near the house was also considered irredeemable.

The house was insured by both the Haffner family, as renters, and the owners.

Beyond losing the roof over their head, family photos, and other essential and material items — including gifts for Christmas next week — both Grant and Cassandra, who are self-employed, also lost the tools that make up their livelihood. Grant lost a collection of limited edition prints, as well as art supplies, including paints and canvases. Cassandra, a chef, lost all of her cookware.

“We lost everything that we use to make our business,” Grant said.

### Community response

About a day after the fire, Buckland-Shelburne Elementary School Principal Hayley Gilmore, who said she knows the Haffner family both as an administrator of the elementary school but also as a parent whose kids are in the same class as the two Haffner children, put out a message to the community, seeking shoes, clothing, books and stuffed animals for the family.

“I knew right away they were going to need a lot of things when we heard their house was leveled and their car was melted,” said Gilmore. “I knew they were going to need the community to come together to support them to get them back on their feet.”

The family is currently staying at a friend’s place with plans to move into the Trinity Church of Shelburne Falls’ vacant pastor house while they search for more permanent housing.

“We have been absolutely overwhelmed by the generosity of the community,” Gilmore said, noting, in particular, the abundance of warm-weather clothing that has been donated.

In light of that, Gilmore said, the need has shifted to financial donations and Christmas donations, but also toward household items — things the family will need when they relocate.

The Haffners are also asking for help replacing Grant’s collection of acrylic paints, wooden canvases and brushes, as well as Cassandra’s cookware, including soup pots, a blender, a heavy-duty Crockpot and a Dutch oven pot. In particular, Cassandra needs good sneakers for working in the kitchen. Typically, she wears Dr. Martens and Dansko brands.

Cassandra added that they hope to find a new home somewhere in the area.

“I never get tired of telling people that I’ve lived in the Caribbean and in the Hamptons, and my favorite place I’ve ever lived is western Massachusetts,” she said. “It’s as beautiful as any other spot in the world, but it’s the people that have made me immediately feel comfortable and welcome. This was the place me and my family belonged.”

Donations to the Haffner family can be made online at [tinyurl.com/HaffnerFamily](https://www.tinyurl.com/HaffnerFamily).

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