

LESSONS FROM THE MANSION FIRE

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The fire that swept through the historic governor's mansion this week was not only a significant personal loss for Gov. Mike Leavitt and his family, it was a loss for all Utahns. The beautiful, 91-year-old mansion belongs to the citizens. It is their home as well as home to whatever governor might be in residence at any particular time.

Without question, the stately, 28-room structure will be fully rebuilt, but it will be expensive - somewhere between \$1 million and \$2 million. Unhappily, some of the unique woodwork, carvings, ceiling plaster work and rare curved glass windows are lost forever. They simply cannot be duplicated. Despite such losses, including most of the personal belongings of the governor and his family, no one was killed or injured. The fire is a reminder that things can be replaced or substituted, but the most important value is that of human life.

That is the attitude being taken by Leavitt and his wife, Jacalyn. They may be burned out of their current home and without a great many personal possessions, but they are all safe and together this Christmas.

Since their regular private residence was leased by others when the Leavitts moved into the governor's mansion this past year, the family is temporarily homeless. They spent the night after the fire in a hotel and had to go shopping for a change of clothes, as well as the basics, including such common items as toothbrushes.

As a successful businessman and insurance executive, the governor is hardly in danger of having to live on the street, but being out of house and home this Christmas season ought to give him and his family a new perspective and appreciation for the plight of the homeless.

Two lessons should be learned from the blaze.

First, it is a graphic reminder of the hazards associated with Christmas decorations. Lights and wiring and trees and other flammable materials pose a special danger during the holiday season. They need to be assembled with safety in mind as well as the colorful visual effects.

Second, the restoration of the governor's mansion ought to include a sprinkling system. The mansion has lacked interior sprinklers, possibly because of the cost and disruption that such installation would cause to any First Family living in the house.

But the fire will be many times more expensive and disruptive than any sprinkler project. And since work on the mansion will be basic and extensive, a sprinkling system can easily be included.

In the meantime, Utahns extend their personal sympathy and heartfelt holiday good wishes to the governor and his family.