

Fire department probing string of 'suspicious' fires

By SHARON CARRASCO
the little sentinel

WINTER PARK — Firefighters are investigating the cause of four fires that occurred on three consecutive mornings last week in the same vicinity, said Assistant Fire Chief Mike Molthrop. He described the fires as "suspicious" in origin.

Two small fires were reported at 10:13 a.m. Monday in the wooded area south of the J.C. Penney's employee parking lot at the Winter Park Mall.

Firefighters responded to a third fire about the same time the next morning in the same area, Molthrop said.

The fourth fire was discovered nearby about 11:05 a.m. in the city-owned park of Lake Island Estates, just north

of Morse Boulevard.

Molthrop said all four fires caused minor damage, occurred in isolated areas and were no threat to homes and businesses. The fires were detected early and there was no wind, he said.

"But even though these fires were minor, any fire is dangerous," Molthrop said. "I still have to commit equipment and manpower to that fire and am losing a part of the force."

Although fire officials aren't saying arson is the cause, Winter Park Detective Ed Butler said Wednesday's fire was "not started by accident."

Butler, who discovered the fire, said he found a small stack of papers and a clump of brown grass ablaze and two empty beer bottles at the scene.

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