



## Riders on ATV trail see piece of local history

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Though it was the same place, it was a much different time. Nearly 33-years have passed since a New Castle News reporter last visited the site of the former Krebs mansion in New Beaver Borough. The last time would have been prior to the publication of the Dec. 31, 1974 edition which, along with articles on the Watergate scandal and the Pittsburgh Steelers' victory over Oakland, included a front-page story on the blaze that destroyed the Krebs home. Ironically, the must-see movie in theaters at that winter was "The Towering Inferno," starring Steve McQueen and Paul Newman. The remains of the building caught a piece of the spotlight last week when Fisher's ATV World, a cable access television show, did some filming at Mines and Meadows ATV Riding Resort on Ashwood Road off Route 18. The three-story, 25 room mansion was built in 1910 by D.M. Kirk, who also constructed Crescent Portland Cement Co., which later was purchased by Medusa Cement Co. (now CEMEX). Arden Krebs, Medusa's plant manager, and his wife, Marjorie, bought the mansion in the early 1930s. The Krebs became known for their lavish parties in the large first-floor ballroom. By 1968 Arden Krebs had retired and move to Florida. The following year, the cement company leased the property to a local church organization, Glen Laurie Christian Fellowship. The fellowship used the mansion for summer camps and weekend retreats. A old barn on the estate was converted into a chapel, and the fellowship added a concrete swimming pool to the pond that was fed by water from a nearby creek. However, on Dec. 30, 1974, at approximately 4 p.m. the mansion burst into flames. Five local fire departments battled the blaze for nearly six hours. The next morning, Keith McKim, the fire chief in Wampum, described the scene to reporters. "One of the worst I've seen since I became fire chief," McKim said. "There was nothing that we could do to save the house." Over 75 percent of the mansion was engulfed by flames. Firefighters later told reporters that only the mansion's exterior walls, made of three rows of bricks, remained intact. The cause of the fire was never determined, but fire officials did say that nearly 30 mattresses on the upper two stories of the mansion likely helped to fuel the blaze. Today, the ruins of the mansion lay scattered between riding trails of the Mines & Meadows ATV Resort. Disturbed only momentarily by motoring quads, the setting quickly returns to a haunting serenity marked by the chirping of frogs and the whispering breezes through a circular wall of trees. Many riders have asked about the estate, according the resort officials. Bob Svihra, resort owner, said he has plans for this site. "I want to be able to set up plaques that kids can walk over to and say, 'oh, this is where that was,' " he said. Svihra and Dave Tullis, vice president of operations at the resort, said they are considering doing more than just adding plaques to the trails. Tullis said member interest and his own fondness of history have Svihra and him mulling a variety of options for the old mansion estate. "When you go out there (the mansion ruins), this is just part of the flavor of the place," Tullis said. "We eventually would like to get to a point where we can bring back at least part of the mansion. There are telephone poles that are completely made of cement, which is pretty amazing when you think about it," he added.

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