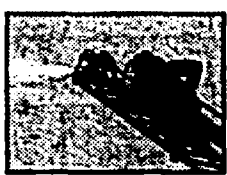


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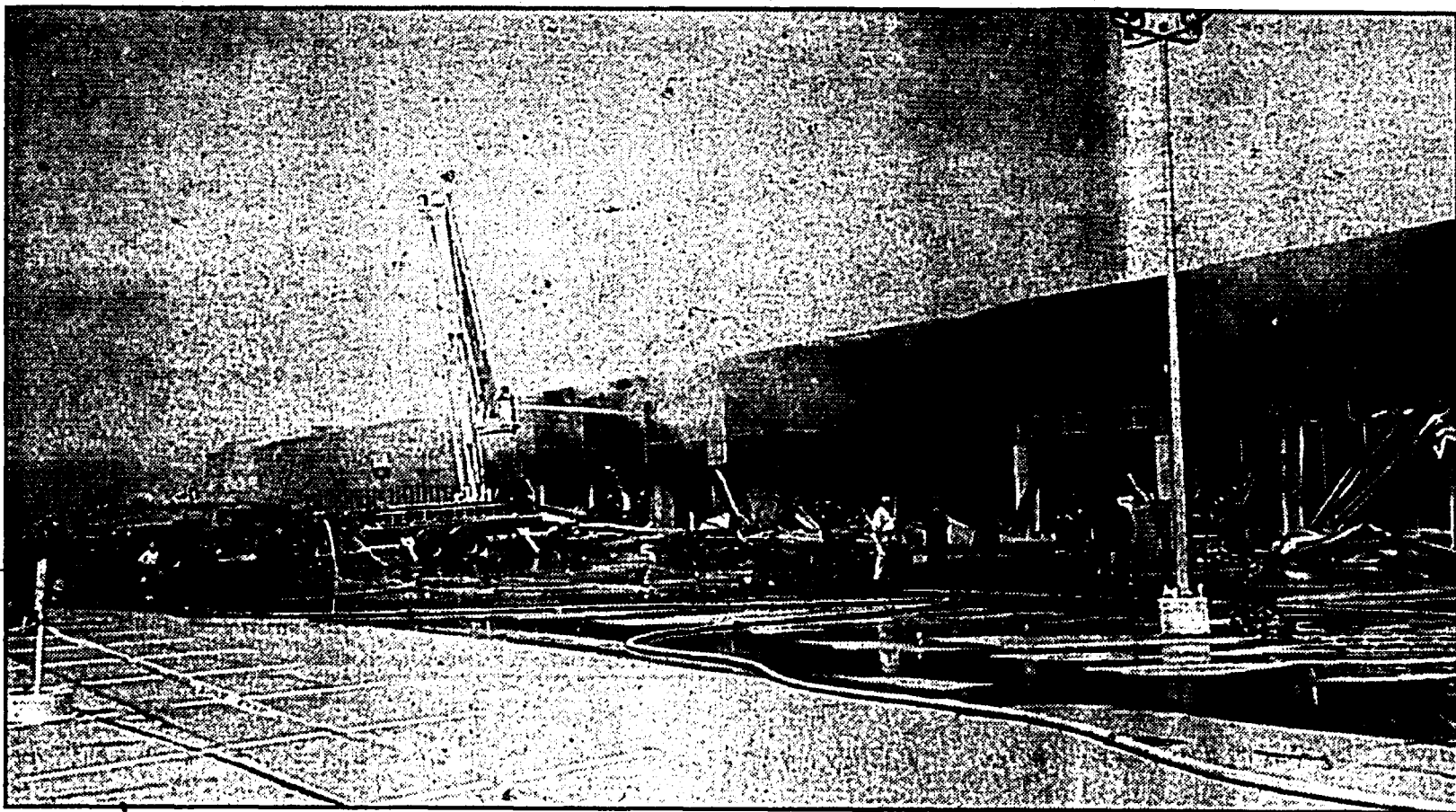
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Fire destroys Lake Center Mall



Lake Center Mall late Wednesday afternoon
Firefighters spray the front of the Lake Center Mall with water late Wednesday afternoon. The building's front wall was torn down to extinguish flames near the roof. Dollar General employees reported a fire in the building at about 10 a.m. Fire chief Bob Bozwell said that the fire started in the rear of the building and moved to the area between the ceiling and the roof. No injuries were reported among mall employees and customers. Two firefighters were treated for heat exhaustion.

Losses total in the millions for Centerville businesses

By **CHUCK CLEMENT**
Managing Editor

A fire that started late Wednesday morning heavily damaged the Lake Center Mall in Centerville.

According to Bob Bozwell, Centerville's fire chief, all indications point toward the fire starting in the rear of the building, in the area where the Dollar General Store was located.

Two staff members of the Dollar General were responsible for the 911 call reporting the fire.

Vicki Thomas, the assistant manager, was the first person to notice trouble when she stepped into the store's storeroom in the back of the building at about 10 a.m.

"I walked into the back room and smelled smoke," Thomas said, as she stood in the mall parking lot watching the firefighters.

Thomas said that she saw flames coming from a high stack of boxed merchandise.

"The flames were just inside the storage room doors," she said. "The boxes were taller than I could reach."

Thomas called out to Tammy Barker, a clerk working at the front counter, to dial 911 to report the fire. After the phone call, the two women evacuated the store.

"We had a full store of people, and we got them all out of there," Barker said.

By 10:25 a.m., Centerville fire fighters were setting up hoses and preparing to soak the blaze in the rear of the mall building. Several of the rear doors were open, and on-lookers could see flames through one doorway.

While the fire fighters were preparing the equipment, many loud pops went off inside building. Flames jumped out of the opening, and the fire spread outside to a small trailer filled with cardboard parked near the doorway.

The team led by fire captain Eric Kozak dealt with several problems during the morning hours.

Several fire fighters were treated for heat exhaustion, and two fire-fighters were evacuated by an ambulance from St. Joseph's Mercy Hospital for heat exhaustion.

An ambulance crew from St. Joseph's Hospital were on duty the entire day. Fighting the blaze was complicated by toxic fumes coming from the fire and dehydration among the fire fighters due to the warm weather.

No other injuries, among fire fighters, store staff or customers

were reported by 3 p.m. By 11:05 a.m., the team at the building's rear exhausted their supply of bottled air and backed away from the building until the fire fighters were resupplied.

By 11 a.m., fire trucks from the Moravia, Mystic, Cincinnati, Moulton and Corydon fire departments arrived to support the city fire department, and a fire truck was on the way from Albia.

As a precaution, work crews from Alliant Energy had spread out material to soak up any hazardous material that could spill from the electrical transformers.

Mobile units and officers from the sheriff's department, city police, the department of transportation and the state patrol handled traffic and crowd control.

Semi-trailer trucks were rerouted through Mystic at the Rathbun turn on Highway 5 north of town.

By midday, several Centerville businesses supplied food and drinks for the fire fighting crews and continued supporting the fire crews throughout the day.

By 12:45 p.m., the Albia boom truck and the Centerville ladder truck were spraying down the roof of the building. The fire fighters also used a backhoe to rip apart the front facade of the building.

Bozwell said the fire had moved from the back of the building into the crawlspace between the ceiling and the roof. Tearing apart the building's front was necessary to fight the fire.

"That's the only way we could get the heat and smoke out of there and start cooling the fire down," Bozwell said.

He also said that the roof had buckled in the area of Dollar General.

At 1 p.m., Bozwell was handling another problem. He received a report that electrical power was down in the south part of Centerville, shutting down the pumps at the water plant that supplied his water.

"Right now, all we've got is the water in the towers," he said. "We may have a chance of getting water from Rathbun Rural Water."

Fire fighters were trying to control the blaze throughout Wednesday afternoon. At mid-afternoon, five fire fighters from Seymour arrived in Centerville.

Some onlookers were surprised at the extent of the damage.

"By now, I thought we'd be in there cleaning up," Vicki Thomas said. "They're talking like they'll be here all night."



Getting at the fire
Ron Creagan, city street superintendent and firefighter, operated a backhoe to tear apart the front wall of the mall building on Wednesday afternoon. Firefighters had to remove parts of the wall to extinguish flames burning between the ceiling and the roof of the building.

Businesses lost to Centerville fire

Fire photos
by
John Arnold
and
Chuck Clement

The Lake Center Mall business owners and managers were counting their losses on Wednesday.

Since there were no reports of injuries among the store staffs or customers, many of the owners and managers only had to worry about property losses.

The mall, located at the northeast corner of Highway 5 and Haynes Avenue, housed stores and offices that included: Stage, the Pizza Ranch, Iowa Trust and Savings

Bank, Lake Center Twin Theaters, the Video Warehouse, Dollar General, On Cue, the Annuity Shop, I. and W. Quarries and Iowa Transportation Department offices.

Smaller businessmen also lost property in the fire.

Max Ervin of Triple E Cleaning lost cleaning equipment and supplies that were stored in the rear of the building. Ervin was responsible for cleaning the mall's corridor floors

Power interrupted during mall fire

About 1,300 Centerville customers lost power for 29 minutes during the early afternoon.

Mike Dabney of Alliant Energy reported that the loss of power was not related to the fire at the Lake Center Mall. Instead, the outage was caused by a squirrel getting into the main circuit breakers

Work crews inspected the power lines and equipment before power was restored.

To assist the firefighters at the mall, Alliant disconnected all electrical power and gas supplied to the building. Work crews bled any remaining gas from the lines to prevent an explosion

Briefs

Grant celebration

Jason Parkin, NewsChannel 8 meteorologist will present a \$1,500 grant to Centerville High School art students in the town square on Thursday, May 20 at 6 p.m.

Centerville plans a celebration dinner/barbecue at 5:30 p.m. that evening.

Driver's license station moves

The Centerville area driver's license station will operate at the Indians Hills Community College on Thursday, May 12.

The station will announce its future location at a later date.

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