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Fire destroys Funky Munky

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One of Waterville's newest businesses in one of the city's oldest locations has been lost to a massive fire early Saturday morning, March 26.

The Funky Munky Saloon and Grill, which was established October 22, 2021, is a total loss after a fire ravaged the business. The Funky Munky is one of many businesses which occupied the location over the past 60+ years.

Le Sueur County Sheriff's Department received the call at approximately 3:07 a.m. Saturday, reporting a structure fire in the City of Waterville. A Waterville Police officer called in the fire after seeing smoke in the rear of the building.

Waterville Fire Department was dispatched shortly thereafter and were joined by eight other area fire departments due to the immense size of the building and the winds which were clocked between 25 and 35 miles per hour coming from the northwest. Had the wind been blowing the other direction, other businesses in the downtown area more than likely would have been destroyed.

Waterville, Waseca, and Faribault Fire Departments used their ladder trucks to douse the flames from above. Other departments came from Elysian, Madison Lake, Morristown, Janesville, Le Center, and Kilkenny.

"Once I got on scene and did an assessment I called for Waseca and Faribault aeriels and mutual aid from the neighboring towns," Waterville Fire Chief Chris Meskan said. When Meskan arrived he saw heavy smoke coming from the roof. That smoke was so dense he was not able to see down 3rd Street.

With three aeriels and a number of on-ground hoses



SATURDAY MORNING



Jay Schneider and TJ Tolzmann photos

Nearly 100 firefighters from nine departments helped contain the fire that destroyed The Funky Munky in Waterville early Saturday, March 26. Top photo: The charred remains of the business. Bottom, left to right: Flames rise 15-20 feet above the structure. The building's remains from an aerial shot. Smoke billows out of the building at approximately 4 a.m. Many adjacent businesses sustained smoke damage.

being used, the water supply began to diminish from the water tower. The water tower was never completely drained. Meskan said there is a certain level you can safely get to before having issues, and he said they were close to that level.

"We needed to switch operations from hydrant to tanker and then to pumping water from the lake," Meskan said.

Meskan said Elysian provided 45,000 gallons of water and Janesville, Kilkenny, Le Center, and Morristown also hauled water in. When it became apparent they needed even more water, the firefighters started pumping from the bay, which is one block north of the structure.

TJ Tolzmann, who lives above the NAPA business located adjacent to the Funky Munky on the west side, said he was awakened by Waterville Police and told to evacuate. Tolzmann and his two children left their apartment, but be-

fore leaving Tolzmann said he could see flames rising through the kitchen area of the Funky Munky.

Tolzmann and his family got out safely, but his Chevy Avalanche was a total loss. It was parked behind the Funky Munky and sustained tremendous damage. Reportedly, the motor and inside of the truck were burned out.

The NAPA building sustained extensive damage to the outside of the business with the siding being melted, smoke damage, and water damage inside, but the building was saved.

Other area businesses received smoke damage including the Double D's Bar, LifeEnterprise Newspaper, Grumpy Old Man Cave, Wiste's Meat Market, and a number of apartments within the vicinity of the blaze.

Meskan said in addition to the smoke there was a large explosion which blew

out the front windows on the north side of the Funky Munky. Once this happened, the swirling winds fed the fire. The building's rubber roof was also an accelerant.

"The wind fueled it really fast once the front window was blown out," Meskan said. "The wind was blowing right through the building. It was not a gas leak. The building would have had more damage (if it was)."

What will happen now to the building in its current condition will depend on when the State Fire Marshal and insurance investigators get a chance to analyze the structure.

"They have to wait until everything thaws out before they can move anything to look at," Meskan said. "Once they come to a conclusion or lack of a conclusion they will get a mandatory order to tear it down."

Thankfully, no one was hurt in the fire, which firemen battled for more than eight hours.

This is the second fire that destroyed a downtown business in Waterville in recent years.

The building with included a laundromat, apartments, and an antique/wood working business on the south end of the same block burned to the ground in July of 2014. This location is now a gravel, city parking lot.

"This fire was a little more challenging," Meskan said compared to the fire they fought eight years ago. "We had a lot more winds Saturday and fortunately they were the right direction. We had to work hard to save the NAPA building."

Historic Location

The Funky Munky building at 256 E. Main Street has a long history of housing businesses in this location.

Decades ago the lot was a parking area for a car dealership. The first building in this location was Luther's Ben Franklin. After many years, the Waterville VFW took over the building and turned it into a bar.

Following the VFW, was the Bay Club, owned by Roger Kruesel, The Angle Inn, owned by Rob and Ginny Hermel, Bingo's Bar, owned by Bingo Morris, Bullhead's Bar and Grill owned by Troy Tuma, then Deb Schleh and Charlie Varacka, and lastly Devin and Cathy Hoy. Angela Kelly took over the bar, which she named Bobber's, but after Kelly was involved in a severe car accident, she was unable to keep the bar open due to her injuries. Kirk Mertins and Greg Wilmes then purchased the bar, which had been closed for many months due to COVID, and re-named it The Funky Munky.

WEM students inducted into Minnesota Honor Society



Minnesota Honor Society members, front row, left to right: Madeline Balfe, Izabela Slechta, Jenae Androli, and Kylie LaFrance. Back row, left to right: Daelyn Judd, Jenessa Baumgarten, Emma Woratschka, Addyson Taylor, Kiri Kerekes, Riley Sammon, Alex Heuss, Anna LeBlanc and Lydia Ell. Not pictured: Emma Kuball and Lindy Caldwell.

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Five WEM High School students were inducted into the Minnesota Honor Society Thursday, March 24 in the Waterville auditorium.

Newly inducted members include junior Jenae Androli, daughter of Dennis and Rachel Androli and sophomores Madeline Bal-

fe, daughter of Ken and Jolene Balfe, Lindy Caldwell, daughter of Joseph and Rachel Caldwell, Kylie LaFrance, daughter of Jared and Stacy LaFrance, and Izabela Slechta, daughter of David and Heather Slechta. The new inductees join senior members Lydia Ell (Steven and Laura Ell), Alexandra Heuss (Shawn and Brenda Heuss), Kiri Kerekes (James and Katherine Kerekes), Emma Kuball (Nathan and Shannon Kuball), Anna

LeBlanc (Nicolle LeBlanc), and Riley Sammon (Nick and Amanda Sammon), and juniors Jenessa Baumgarten (Kris Baumgarten and Jason Baumgarten), Daelyn Judd (Patrick and Karissa Judd), Addyson Taylor (Tauston and Angie Taylor), and Emma Woratschka (Mike and Jennifer Woratschka).

The Minnesota Honor Society (MHS) is an organization that was created to recognize and encourage academic achievement while developing a well-rounded student.

An ideal MHS member possesses many qualities such as knowledge, character, service, and leadership. This membership is both an honor and a commitment.

As long as the student fulfills her respective roles enthusiastically, MHS will continue to thrive for the benefits of its members and the organization.

MHS members must have a grade point average of 3.4 or higher and must complete numerous hours of community service projects.

WEM Board hears concerns about school safety

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A number of local residents addressed the WEM Board of Education at the board's March 28 meeting regarding safety and harassment within the schools.

Recent incidents prompted the discussions and concerns.

The individuals who spoke were in agreement that they would like to see WEM Schools safe for everyone.

Brenda Heuss, one of those who participated in the visitor's comments portion of the meeting, reviewed the school's mission, vision, beliefs, and strategic plan. She brought forward a number of requests to the Board aligned with the district's goals and which she believed are aligned with Minnesota State's Human Rights Act.

"The creation of new policies and programs that directly and intentionally create an inclusive safe environment for all students," Heuss said.

"To truly accomplish these programs and policies should specifically and directly include the protected classes as well as the more prevalent white, heterosexual community. We need to find ways to embrace differences and be stronger together."

Some of the individuals talked about acts of harassment. Shawn Heuss said he doesn't want to see a culture where it is OK to hurt people.

The school district has been proactive with its BUCS Pride program, which has been implemented for a number of years.

"The existing BUCS Pride program should be reassessed for its effectiveness at the junior and high school levels," she said. "Based on student behavioral trends, it does not seem effective for those grades. It appears to be

Board to 8



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