

Black smoke could be seen billowing from the roof and upper-level windows of Washington Square Mall in downtown Detroit Lakes on Friday afternoon, as a ladder truck from the Detroit Lakes Fire Department brought firefighters and hoses up to the roof to battle the blaze.

Vicki Gerdes / Tribune



# The Detroit Lakes Tribune

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## 'RECREATIONAL' FIRE SPREADS

*Downtown blaze started on apartment deck, leaves major damage*

By Nathan Bowe and Vicki Gerdes  
Detroit Lakes Tribune

A fire that heavily damaged a building in downtown Detroit Lakes, and caused smoke and water damage in parts of the Washington Square Mall, was caused by an apartment resident having a recreational fire on an outdoor back deck area, and will be ruled "unintentional," by the state fire marshal's office, according to Detroit Lakes Fire Chief Ryan Swanson. Wind and dry conditions helped spark the blaze, which was put out after several hours by fire crews,

including two ladder trucks that pumped about 360,000 gallons of water onto the blaze. Thick smoke filled the downtown area at times during the fire.

"People need to really be careful with their recreational fires – we've had some rain, but we have real dry conditions," Swanson said Monday.

The fire broke out in an upstairs apartment at 814 Washington Ave., above Mattson's Barbershop.

"When I got there, the fire was already climbing the wall on the inside of the building and got into the roof area," Swanson said Friday.

Firefighters gained access

to the apartment and battled the flames from there after using a ladder truck to get to the roof, where they cut holes through the roofing material to get at the fire.

"The problem is, there were two or three layers of roofing, so it's taken a lot to get to it (the fire)," Swanson said at the time.

Once that roofing was penetrated, the smoke got really heavy, really fast, said Amanda Jenzen, who works at Manna Food Co-op downtown. The fire happened on the other side of Washington Avenue from Manna.

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Nathan Bowe / Tribune

ServiceMaster restoration crews were busy cleaning and purifying on Monday to remove smoke residue from the Washington Square Mall.

## Memories relived at Hall of Honor banquet



Michael Achterling / Detroit Lakes Tribune

Members and coaches of the 2006-2007 Lakers girls basketball team, and the other eight awardees smile with their commemorative plaque after being inducted into the 2021 Hall of Honor class by the Detroit Lakes Athletic Foundation at the Historic Holmes Theatre on Sept. 11, 2021.

By Michael Achterling  
Detroit Lakes Tribune

Memories, tears and sports excellence were celebrated at the Detroit Lakes Athletic Foundation's Hall of Honor banquet at the Historic Holmes Theatre on Saturday.

In a packed to capacity event, eight new members and the 2006-2007 Lakers girls basketball team were inducted into hall on Sept. 11 in front of their families and friends. The awardees were celebrated for their excellence in Lakers sports and promoting the betterment local athletics; two of the main criteria for acceptance into the hall. The banquet was suppose to be held in 2020, but was cancelled due to the ongoing

COVID-19 pandemic.

"I'm really happy for all the inductees and their families," said Jeff Perkins, an event organizer and foundation committee member. "We let them know almost two years ago that they were going to be inducted and then, of course, with the worldwide pandemic, everything got pushed back and thankfully we were able to pull it off tonight and I think it went really well."

Perkins said he was impressed with the public speaking skills the inductees showed during the program, even if the program ran longer than anticipated.

"Traditions like this are built off of those that come before you," he said, "and that's what

we're honoring tonight, those that have built the programs that Detroit Lakes has to offer today."

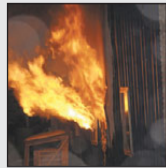
Receiving the Anderson/Lia award, Dr. Tom Seaworth was the first honoree of the night. The Anderson/Lia award, named after former Detroit Lakes Newspaper Sports Editor Ralph Anderson and KDLM sports reporter Andy Lia, is presented to an individual who volunteered a large amount of their own time for the betterment of Lakers athletics. Seaworth was instrumental in securing sports medicine services for Detroit Lakes High School and has examined countless local athletes for more than 30 years.

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## DL Chamber turns 100

Centennial celebration is Thursday; open to public

By Marie Johnson  
Detroit Lakes Tribune

It's a big year for big birthdays in Lakes Country.

Detroit Lakes and Becker County have both been celebrating their 150th birthdays in 2021, and now there's another milestone in the mix, with the Detroit Lakes Regional Chamber of Commerce turning 100.

The chamber will be marking the occasion with a special centennial celebration this Thursday, Sept. 16 from 4:30-6:30 p.m. at The Meadows on Lind in Detroit Lakes.

**CHAMBER:** Page A2



Contributed

Chamber of Commerce staff members Jean Erickson, Cleone Stewart, Sandy Stilke and Carrie Johnston; each has been with the chamber for several years or longer.

## FIRE

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### Lots of smoke

“There wasn’t much smoke right away,” she said, but firefighters went after the fire through the front door and through the roof, and “it took off really fast,” she said. Thick smoke filled most of the downtown area until shortly after 5 p.m., when it had largely subsided.

Firefighters high up on ladder trucks kept up a steady stream from hoses, firing down onto the roofs below.

The Washington Square Mall, with several small stores and restaurants, is a mix of older buildings on Washington Avenue and new construction further back. The fire started in one of those older downtown buildings. It is not technically part of the mall.

Eventually, firefighters “busted a window open,” and entered an apartment above the barbershop, and the smoke subsided shortly after that, Jenzen said.

Katie Poppler watched firefighters battle the blaze from her apartment across the street in Norby Flats.

The smoke at times was so thick you couldn’t see across the street, but most of it blew away from Norby Flats, and wasn’t a problem for Poppler.

“The firefighters did great,” she said. “They called in some help and got it under control.”

As far as financial impact, the fire in downtown Detroit Lakes Friday “is going to be a huge deal,” Swanson said. “We had epic smoke damage throughout the mall and water damage throughout the mall,” he said. Fortunately, he added, “we did contain the fire to that one building – it did not spread.”

That was by no means certain when the fire was first reported. “I was concerned about it spreading,” Swanson said. “Audubon was paged right away, and then Perham was paged for a ladder truck even



Nathan Bowe / Tribune

Leela & Lavender owners Laura Polanski, left, and Jill Shea, take stock of the situation in their store Saturday after a fire in a nearby building.

before we knew the exact location.”

The Perham and Detroit Lakes ladder trucks were both firing their water hoses full bore down at the flames for about two hours, he said. Both shoot 1,500 gallons of water per minute, “so that’s 3,000 gallons a minute for about two hours. That’s a lot of water,” he said.

The apartment fire was put out first, Swanson said, but not before the mall suffered varying amounts of smoke damage.

### Dodging a bullet

But it could have been a lot worse. “We could have ended up with fire inside the mall,” he said. “Obviously, the mall is right adjacent to this building, in fact the (rear) windows are even with the roofline of the mall. If those windows had broken, fire would have spread into the mall,” Swanson said.

Firefighters from Audubon, Callaway, Frazee, Perham and Vergas all helped fight the big Detroit Lakes fire, and law enforcement officers from Detroit Lakes and Becker County helped to control

traffic around the block, which was evacuated.

The entire mall was closed the day after the fire for damage assessment, but on Sunday a number of businesses had reopened, including the restaurants and movie theater on the parking lot side of the mall.

On Monday, the mall hallways were humming with fans, ozone cleaners and hydroxyl portable air purifiers brought in by ServiceMaster for the smoke cleanup.

“The air machines need to run 48 to 72 hours for maximum effectiveness,” Mall General Manager Dawn Livdahl said on Saturday.

“The big thing is we are so lucky, with the quick thinking and action of the firefighters, the fire did not get out of hand,” Livdahl added. “It sure could have been a different story this morning. Hats off to good decision-making and getting the fire under control.”

### Cleanup well underway

On Saturday, cleanup efforts were already underway, with crews

mitigating the water and smoke damage – mostly smoke damage, Livdahl said.

“Each of our clothing stores are in contact with ServiceMaster to do whatever needs to be done in their business,” she added. “I’m not sure when the clothing stores will open again. Glik’s had the most damage.”

With luck, Glik’s can reopen in four to six weeks, she said. The other clothing stores, including Leela & Lavender and Maurice’s, will have to wait to see when they can reopen.

At Leela & Lavender, manager Shannon Johnson and owners Jill Shea and Laura Polanski were taking stock of the situation on Saturday.

“We look pretty good in here,” Johnson said. “There wasn’t much water in here and we were able to mop it up.”

The store is fortunate to have glass doors leading into the mall, rather than a security gate like some other stores, because the glass doors kept a lot of the smoke out, Johnson said.

As for the damages, “it’s

all being evaluated, today is evaluation day,” at the mall, she said.

The mall has insurance and individual retailers have their own insurance, but the mall is coordinating the cleanup effort through ServiceMaster, she said. “ServiceMaster will air it (the store) out, they’re getting fans and ozone machines in here,” Johnson said. The process is expected to take at least four days at Leela & Lavender.

“We set it up with ServiceMaster – each store separately decides what to do,” she added. “The other stores are sitting a little differently.” A woman at another clothing store declined to comment on Saturday.

“I’m just trying to do the right thing and get everything ready and open for business,” Livdahl said on Saturday.

She thanked businesses and residents who provided food and water to first responders during the fire, and thanked area business owners who stepped up and offered to help mall businesses with everything from cooking space to salon space to retail space.

“Our heartfelt thanks to these people,” she said. “That’s what makes Detroit Lakes what it is.”

### Many mall businesses have reopened

By Monday, 14 stores at the mall had reopened: By going in the southeast entrance by LaBarista, you can access that coffee shop and restaurant, as well as Jerry’s Optical, 180 Balance Yoga, Liv n Dye Salon, DL Floral, Wheelchairs Unlimited, Forever Summer tanning, Integrated Electronics, and MN Multimedia.

Through the northwest parking lot door, you can access Pizza Hut, Chinese Dragon, Don Pablo’s, Cinemagic 7 theater and Personal FX.

Other stores and businesses in the mall will reopen when they are ready to serve customers again.

# “It’s keeping our economy going.”

What does the Line 3 replacement mean for Minnesota?



### Anton

Chair, Thief River Falls Area Chamber

“Talking with Chamber members, they’re busy. They’re busy as they have even been. It’s great for us. It couldn’t have been better timing.”

“Our hotels are all full. Rental apartments, I mean they’re all full. It’s keeping our economy going. We’re busy right now, all the way across the board.”

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