

Looking for answers



REX BROWN | THE JOURNAL

Investigators with the Oconee County fire investigation team and the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division dig through the ashes looking for answers to the cause of a fire early Tuesday morning at the Keowee Lakeshop on S.C. Highway 11 near Salem.

Cause undetermined after early-morning fire destroys SC Highway 11 business

BY NORM CANNADA
THE JOURNAL

SALEM — As they dealt with the destruction from an early-morning fire Tuesday at a building they had owned together for the past 10 years near Lake Jocassee, Bruce May and Phillip Maloney said their sadness was tempered by the fact that no one was hurt in the blaze.

"It is sort of sadness in a sense that it's such a landmark and for me it's been a dream in terms of me moving

here and what I wanted to do and still hope to do," May said Tuesday afternoon. "My second reaction was, 'You know what, nobody died; everybody is OK and things can be replaced.'"

Maloney echoed his partner's sentiment after the fire at the Keowee Lakeshop,

which the two owned and rented to the business owner, Sonny Ali. Ali could not be reached for comment Tuesday.

"I'm just glad no one got hurt," Maloney said. "That's

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FIRE: Arson is not suspected, Gibbs said

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the main thing once I heard it was on fire."

The fire was reported at 2:41 a.m. after a burglar alarm went off at the store, according to fire marshal Shane Gibbs. The Oconee County Sheriff's Office initially responded, and Gibbs said firefighters were dispatched after deputies saw the fire.

"The fire was very well involved by the time we had enough manpower on the scene to do anything, and the store was a total loss," Gibbs said.

No one was at the building when firefighters arrived.

Travis Collins, lead investigator for the Oconee fire investigation team, said he and the other county investigators and officials with the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division were digging through the ashes in the building Tuesday looking for answers to the origin and cause of the fire. He said they are also trying to determine

if there was a burglary or if the alarm was tripped by the fire.

Gibbs said SLED ruled the cause of the fire undetermined on Tuesday because there was too much damage to make a determination, but arson is not suspected.

Angie Trout, who has worked at the store for the past 15 months, said she was "devastated" as she watched Collins and his team sort through the rubble of the business.

"This was my bread and butter," she said. "I'm surprised the wind is not blowing that building down. It's really delicate."

She added she didn't know how Tuesday's fire would affect her.

"I don't know what we're going to do," Trout said. "I want to find out what we can do. Thank God nobody was hurt. Things can be replaced, lives can't."

Glenn Ladines, of Georgia-based Performance Food Service, said he has ordered food for Ali for about 12 years.

"It's a shame," he said. "This

place would really hop during the summertime. It provided gas for the boats and food (for customers). It has been very successful here."

Ladines, who lives in Clemson, said he began getting phone calls from people in the Salem area about the fire around 5 a.m. Tuesday.

"It's sad," he said. "It totally took it down. The only thing you can do now is rebuild it, which is a good thing, because we needed more room anyway."

Maloney and May said they plan to rebuild.

"To me it's sort of a signature of Lake Keowee and Lake Jocassee," May said. "It's really the first place people should go and the last place they should stop before they leave. We've got to make sure we have something that welcomes not just people from here, but all the people who come in for vacation and just to enjoy the area."

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An early-morning fire Tuesday destroyed the Keowee Lakeshop on S.C. Highway 11 near Salem.