



CITY OF KENNER

News Release

E. "BEN" ZAHN III
MAYOR

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Feb. 19, 2018

FIRE HEAVILY DAMAGES HISTORIC OLD KENNER HIGH SCHOOL

Kenner, LA. – The Kenner Fire Department received a call at 12:32 a.m. from a concerned resident reporting that flames could be seen coming out of the old Kenner High School building, and firefighters were dispatched a minute later to the school at 1601 Rev. Richard Wilson Drive.

The first firefighters on the scene, who responded from Station 36, 2000 3rd St., found the high school fully involved. Flames and smoke were coming out of the second floor windows as well as the entire roof across the width of the school. Firefighters immediately began to extinguish the blaze, which is under control but still burning at this time.

Seven fire trucks were on scene, including five ladder trucks. The Fire Department received assistance from the Kenner Volunteer Fire Department and the Third District Volunteer Fire Department and the fire is still working at this time.

The Kenner High School is an historic landmark that last housed classes until 1996. Recently, the city was awarded a grant to begin renovations to put it back to public use.

Mayor Ben Zahn responded to the scene along with first responders. "I want to thank the Kenner Fire Department, Kenner Police Department and East Jefferson EMS who responded, along with the Office of Emergency Management. It's sad because we were on our way to replacing the roof and had future plans for restoring the building."

The facility was the first school in the city when it opened in 1924 for students in kindergarten through 12th grade. The last senior class graduated in 1955. At that point, the school operated as a junior high until it closed in 1996.

The old Kenner High School was included on the National Register of Historic Places in 2008, and in 2012 it was named one of the New Orleans area's nine most endangered historic sites by the Louisiana Landmark Society.

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According to Acting Fire Chief Stan Genovese, the old school was built with huge timbers, which contributed to the rapid engulfment and heavy embers coming off the building. Power in the area was disconnected by Entergy for the safety of responders.

"Everyone did a good job," Genovese said. "Sometimes fires look simple, but our teams handled the obstacles to protect what we could. It's unfortunate that the historical building may be a loss, but there were no injuries of first responders. The skeleton remains as we continue to extinguish the fire."

Once extinguished and the main structure is deemed safe to enter, the State Fire Marshal will be notified to conduct an arson investigation. Kenner fire officials report there was no power source to the building.

Residents are advised to stay indoors with windows closed in this neighborhood because of the smoke still coming from the fire. Officials with the Armstrong New Orleans International Airport have also been advised as the light wind is carrying the smoke toward the control tower and runway.

"We will keep the community updated as more information is available," Mayor Zahn said.

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