



CITY OF KENNER

PRESS RELEASE

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MAYOR

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3-ALARM FIRE IN NORTH KENNER DISPLACES ABOUT 50 RESIDENTS

NO INJURIES WERE REPORTED IN THE 3 P.M. BLAZE

Kenner, LA. – Approximately 50 people were left homeless after a three-alarm fire tore through a two-building apartment complex Sunday afternoon in north Kenner, Fire Chief John Hellmers said.

No one was injured in the blaze, which severely damaged the two apartment buildings that are connected by a breezeway at the corner of Alabama and Vintage Drive.

“While this is a serious event for the families involved, and the loss of property is apparently very significant, we are extremely fortunate that no one was injured,” Kenner Mayor Michael Yenni said. “I also want to thank all first responders who responded to this fire.”

Hellmers said 9 of the 10 units in each of the buildings was occupied, and he and other officials at the scene estimated at least 50 people were affected. A total of nine fire trucks, six staff units and 36 firefighters were at the scene, he said. The cause of the fire was undetermined Sunday evening, he said.

Hellmers credited the quick work by Assistant Chief Sam Genovese, who was the first firefighter on the scene and immediately upgraded the call from a 1-alarm to a 3-alarm fire. That triggered mutual response agreements with the Jefferson Parish East Bank Consolidated Fire Department and the 3rd District Volunteer Fire Department.

The fire started somewhere in the front building closest to Vintage Drive and spread to the back building, said Hellmers, who arrived on the scene about five minutes after the initial call at 2:57 p.m.

“We sent crews in the building to check for any occupants ... but it was clear the fire was growing exponentially in the attic and we pulled everyone back from the building and went to an exterior attack on that front building and had a simultaneous attack on the building in back.”

Aerial trucks were used on both buildings, but there was little that firefighters could do, Hellmers said. “The fire got a real head start on us.”

Hellmers said he’s not sure why the fire wasn’t reported sooner – the first firefighters on the scene reported the metal rain gutter had already melted off of the rear building. He said representatives from the state Fire Marshal’s office, Jefferson Parish Arson Department and the office of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms were on the scene late Sunday afternoon.

Kenner Code Enforcement Director Aimee Vallot said the front building was heavily damaged and will definitely have to be demolished. That same fate is likely for the second building, she said.

The Red Cross was on the scene registering residents of the two buildings for assistance, said Arleeta Terrell, director of Kenner's Community Development Department.

Terrell said the fire was the worst, as far as displacing tenants, since one in south Kenner four to five years ago that affected 33 families.

"People have lost everything they own," Terrell said.

The owners of the apartment building, Swee and Elaine Huang of Kenner, were insured, but few if any of the 20 families living in the building had insurance, said Rob Cambias, owner of Cambias Insurance Agency.

Red Cross Disaster Program Manager Melanie Cole was among the Red Cross representatives on the scene. Cole said most families will be unable to salvage anything from the badly damaged units, so that help from the Red Cross and the public will be invaluable.

If anyone wants to call to inquire about donations to victims of the fire, they can contact Cole's office Monday morning at (504) 620-3105. She said a recorder is being set up to take any and all messages and then Red Cross workers will follow up the phone calls.

Kenner 3rd District Councilman Keith Reynaud said Sunday evening from the scene that he had already spoken with city recreation officials to open up a room in the Galatas Playground where donations for the families affected by the fire can be received.

"They are going to need help and District 3 will be there to help, just as we have in previous fires and in previous emergencies," he said.

He said anyone interested in helping can call his office beginning Monday morning and ask for Darilyn at (504) 468-7249.

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