

PRESS RELEASE

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Downtown De Pere building destroyed in fire

DE PERE, WIS. – An emergency call for 100 South Broadway on downtown De Pere’s east side came in at 12:30 a.m. on April 24. De Pere Fire Rescue responded and found heavy smoke on the first floor at Ogan Restaurant. A devastating fire ensued, and De Pere Fire Rescue was aided in fighting the blaze by many neighboring agencies, with 80 plus firefighters assisting with the fire.

The building – which is more than 100 years old – is a total loss.

Fortunately, all individuals who lived in the second floor apartments were evacuated from the building and are safe, as well as all pets who were housed in the building as well.

The De Pere Health Department and the American Red Cross were onsite to help the roughly 20 people displaced by the fire, and several local businesses have also stepped in to help provide temporary shelter for the displaced, as well as resources for businesses that were destroyed in the blaze as well.

Businesses that were housed at the site include Ogan Restaurant, Turba-Schroeder Photography, and XO Fitness.

"Residents within the building awoke and began to alert each other of the fire. Then law enforcement arrived on scene, and assisted with evacuations. When the fire department arrived, we ensured no other individuals were trapped within the structure," said De Pere Fire Chief Alan Matzke. "We were able to clear the building and ensure that everyone was out and safe."

During the blaze, at least three buildings south of the scene were evacuated out of caution. Firefighters initially attacked the fire within the structure, but a collapsing ceiling forced crews to withdraw and battle the incident with an exterior, defensive operation to try to protect the surrounding buildings.

Chief Matzke reported that crews were drawing such a high volume of water initially that they were depleting the City’s water system while using all hydrants in the downtown area.

"At the onset, we used at least 6,000 gallons of water to subdue this blaze. We were flowing thousands and thousands of gallons per minute initially and eventually moved three trucks to the river to feed additional water for our operation," Matzke said.

Due to this sizable incident, as well as a portion of the building collapsing into the roadway during the blaze, the De Pere Police Department closed off sections of South Broadway, Front Street and others. These roadways remained closed for much of the morning.

With the assistance of De Pere Public Works, the road was cleared of debris, and all roads were re-opened at roughly 8:45 a.m. to through traffic.

In all, De Pere Fire Rescue maintained an ongoing presence to battle the blaze and monitor the site afterwards for roughly 8 hours.

Nearly 140 years earlier, almost to the exact date, this location suffered a similar disaster. On April 23, 1882, a fire destroyed buildings in the 100 and 200 blocks of N and S Broadway.

In terms of this new chapter of loss for De Pere's downtown, De Pere Mayor Mike Walsh arrived at the scene of the blaze around 2:30 a.m. on Wednesday, and said his thoughts are with those affected. First and foremost, though, he is glad everyone is safe.

"It's a very somber morning, and it's sad to see a piece of local history lost. This was a very old building with a lot of history attached to it, but unfortunately with those types of buildings, it doesn't take long for them to go up during a fire," Mayor Walsh said, "It's a shame, and I feel deeply for everyone affected by this loss – the owner of the building, the people who work there, who own a business there, who live there.

"But buildings can be replaced and people can't. So, we are incredibly thankful that everyone affected by the fire made it out safely. Our fire, police, health and public works department worked together beautifully in a horrible situation to ensure this situation wasn't much worse."

The incident is currently under investigation and dollar loss being calculated. If you had additional questions, please contact Chief Al Matzke at (920) 445-4801.

As noted, a shelter was opened for residents displaced by the fire. Both Red Cross and the De Pere Health Department were able to assess the needs of these residents. The shelter is no longer open, as residents have been relocated. However, if you were affected by the fire, but did not receive immediate assistance, please call either the De Pere Health Department at 920-339-4054 or the American Red Cross at 888-627-7521.

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