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5 killed in fraternity house fire



FATAL FIRE: Chapel Hill firefighters remove a body from the Phi Gamma Delta fraternity house on West Cameron Avenue Sunday on

the UNC campus. Five people were reported killed and three injured in an early morning fire at the house. Officials still are probing the cause.

The Herald-Sun/DE WELLS

Officials: Death toll not expected to rise

Cause of blaze won't be known for several days

By RAY GRONBERG
The Chapel Hill Herald

CHAPEL HILL — The happiest occasion in the UNC calendar turned into its most tragic Sunday as an early-morning fire raged through a fraternity house, killing at least five people and injuring three, one of them critically.

Witnesses and fire officials said the 6:07 a.m. blaze, which gutted the Phi Gamma Delta house at 108 W. Cameron Ave., moved quickly.

"It had engulfed the downstairs. It was like an inferno," said an employee of the Carolina Inn, located across the street from the house. "I was amazed at how quickly. It was a tinderbox."

It was thought to be the first fatal fraternity fire in the history of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

One of the students killed was identified by friends as UNC sophomore Ben Woodruff, a business major from Raleigh.

"It's devastating to everyone," said Randy Worth, a neighbor and friend of the family who answered the phone at the Woodruff home in Raleigh.

"Probably the biggest nightmare of a firefighter is something like this," said one firefighter at the



The Herald-Sun/JOE WEISS

CLEAN UP: Chapel Hill firefighters enter a second-story window to extinguish an early-morning blaze at Phi Gamma Delta fraternity house Sunday.

Level of fire safety is varied across U.S.

"The door was open, people were in the doorway and the music was playing. It was the early-morning Chapel Hill scene at a fraternity house."

ANDREA LEACH
CAROLINA INN EMPLOYEE

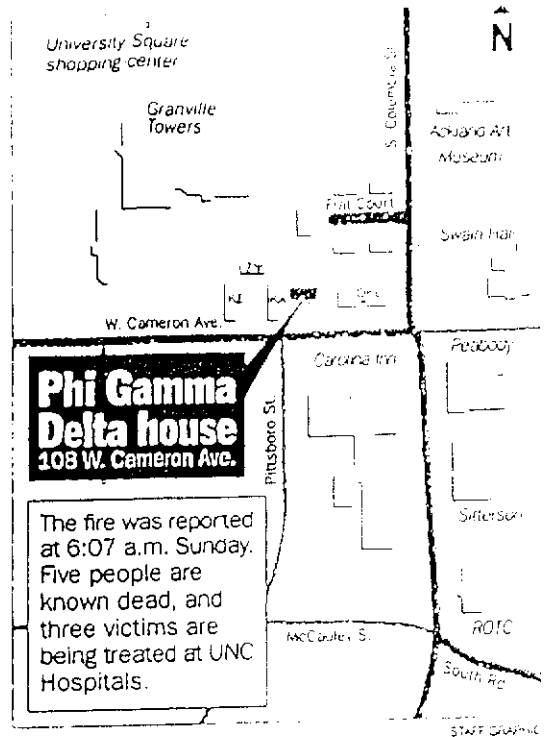
"It had engulfed the downstairs. It was like an inferno. I was amazed at how quickly. It was a tinderbox."

UNIDENTIFIED CAROLINA INN EMPLOYEE



The Herald-Sun/JOE WEISS

MOTHER'S GRIEF: An unidentified woman, reported to be the mother of one of the victims of a Phi Gamma Delta fraternity house fire, is comforted by an unidentified member of the fraternity. Fire officials still are investigating the cause of the blaze that killed five people and injured three.



SCENE

Although investigators still were having trouble late Sunday getting into the building's basement, where the fire is thought to have started, Chapel Hill Fire Chief Dan Jones said he did not expect the death toll to rise. Only eight people are thought to have been in the house at the time of the fire, and all have been accounted for.

Officials had not yet determined the cause of the fire and did not expect to for several days.

Tim Reid, a Phi Kappa Sigma fraternity member who graduated on Sunday, said he saw the flames shooting out the top-floor windows and the roof of the nearby fraternity house at about 7:15 a.m.

"The back yard was flooded from all the water the firefighters were shooting into the house," Reid said.

The names of the other people killed had not been officially released by 9:30 p.m., but one was believed to be a female student from Cary.

please see FIRE/2

By CHRISTOPHER KIRKPATRICK
The Chapel Hill Herald

Across the nation, the safety of living quarters for college students in school-sanctioned fraternity houses has come under fire over the years.

An early-morning blaze Sunday that killed at least five people in the Phi Gamma Delta house at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is sure to revive the debate, even though the house is not on university property.

In Sunday's fire in Chapel Hill, initial witness and survivor reports have smoke detectors going off in the fraternity house, which did not have a sprinkler system. A maintenance worker also said the house passed a fire-safety inspection about two months ago.

The issue of fire safety and how seriously schools take it has varied greatly among colleges.

One week after the Phi Gamma Delta house at Southern Methodist

please see SAFETY/2

Smoke detectors could have saved Olson's life

By Cindy Blisok
The Spectator

Working smoke detectors could have saved the life of sophomore Brad Olson, who died of smoke inhalation Wednesday in a fire at 621 Hudson St.

"If the students would have had working smoke detectors in the home ... it would have allowed them, perhaps, we feel, ample time to escape," Fire Inspector Jim Onarheim said.

Richard and Mary Svengard, the home's owners, received three citations because smoke detectors weren't operating at the time of the fire, Assistant Fire Chief William Schulte said Friday at a press conference.

"(The occupants) claim they did not remove batteries," Onarheim said. "We have statements from the occupants that it had been quite some time since the detectors (had been) working."

A cigarette left burning in a first-floor bedroom was most likely the cause, Schulte said.

Olson's body was found in his second-floor bedroom above the fire's origin, he said.

Please see Fire page 12

Family gives in time of loss

Although Brad Olson's family is grieving a loss, his father has found one comfort.

Herschel Olson of Osceola said he finds solace in the donation of Brad's organs.

His heart, skin, bones and tissue were given to an organ donor program, Olson said.

"We have found very much comfort knowing he is still doing good, still living on in the lives of other people" he said.

"He was a lovable kid, always smiling," his father said. "He had a bounce in his step and was always happy."

Olson said he has been pleased with the university's attention and emotional assistance.

For example, associate dean Robert Shaw, of students, and students came to the hospital after the fire Wednesday night.

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Fire ●

The fire was in the first floor, directly below the occupant's room where he died," Onarheim said.

The room (where the fire started) was completely enclosed, and it built up heat (to the point) where it broke out windows."

Another Eau Claire student, sophomore Benjamin Breault, lived in the house, said Robert Shaw, associate dean of students.

Two other residents, Jonathan Hawlish and Benjamin Rodman, are former students, Shaw said.

At the time of the fire, Rodman and Breault were watching television in the basement. They escaped through a secondary exit in the basement after flames and smoke blocked the stairs, Onarheim said.

Smoke and fire also trapped Olson in his bedroom, he said.

"We speculate he tried to escape but was met by heavy smoke," he said. "He, at that time, retreated back to the furthest point away from the fire."

Officials said Olson probably tried to escape through a window by breaking it with his fist.

Rescue crew members administered CPR to Olson and transported him to Luther Hospital, where he was pronounced dead at 8:45 p.m.



Eau Claire fire inspectors tour the wreckage Thursday after Wednesday's fire ravaged the house at 621 Hudson St. The blaze probably started in a first-floor bedroom. photo by Anselmo Pontes/The Spectator

Inflation / Wisconsin tuition rates lower

Police seize pot, paraphernalia at Hudson fire site

By Cindy Blisek
The Spectator

Evidence of drugs found at 621 Hudson St., the scene of an Oct. 12 fire that killed UW-Eau Claire sophomore Brad Olson, suggests that marijuana was used and possibly sold at the house.

Police found unidentified pills and suspected marijuana in the house during a search to inspect electrical outlets and extension cords for evidence of electrical overload.

"What was there was there," said Benjamin Breault, a sophomore and one of the house's residents, when asked about results of the search.

According to the search warrant evidence report:

Police seized a telephone answering machine because it could have been used to record evidence of the sale of the drugs.

A green leafy substance was found in a bag in the stairway. The contents, weighing 38.5 grams, tested positive for the presence of THC, the active chemical in marijuana.

Another 37.1 gram bag was found in the bedroom of former student Benjamin Rodman, 22. It also tested positive for THC.

Eight petri dishes, eight alcohol swabs, a silver-colored threaded bowl, 14 anti-drug flyers and two High Times magazines also were found in Rodman's bedroom.

Please see Fire page 12



photo by Anselmo Pontes/The Spectator
Signs at 621 Hudson St. warn people to stay out. The Oct. 12 fire took the life of Brad Olson, 22.

Fire/No charges filed in blaze

A burlap bag with the words "marijuana 50 kilos" was found on Rodman's bedroom door.

A manual scale, a silver-colored bowl used to smoke tobacco, a pipe with residue in the bowl, and a white Tupperware dish containing seeds similar to marijuana seeds and plant stems were found in the bedroom of Jonathan Hawlis, 22.

Ameritech telephone bills addressed to Hawlis were taken to establish residency.

Four water pipes (bongs), a manual scale and a plastic baggie containing a "green leafy vegetable substance" were found in the house, but police didn't determine their owners.

A plastic bag containing 18 white tablets was found in the kitchen, and a pill bottle containing 74 pills of two different types was found in the basement.

Police didn't determine the owner of the pills.

"The unidentified pills were vitamins or aspirin," Breault said. "Scales and pro-marijuana (items) are by no means illegal."

"It is irresponsible to imply that those pills were in any way related to the investigation," Rodman

CONTRABAND

Items found at 621 Hudson St.

- A total of 75.6 grams of a leafy green substance containing THC
- Eight petri dishes
- A manual scale
- Four water pipes (bongs)
- A pipe with residue in the bowl
- A plastic bag containing 18 white tablets
- A pill bottle containing 74 pills of two different types

said. "It is irresponsible to imply that we are drug users because of any vitamins we may have.

"It is inaccurate and deliberately misleading."

No items were determined to belong to Olson.

Inspector James Onarheim of the Eau Claire Fire Department said Breault and a friend were smoking in Breault's bedroom the evening of the fire and Breault mentioned that ash and coals fell on the bed and floor.

Onarheim wouldn't comment on what they were smoking.

A spokesperson for the district attorney's office said no charges had been filed as of Friday.

Rodman said he has been frus-

trated with the way the police are handling the case.

"I've tried to get in contact with (the police), but they refuse to return my calls," he said. "Everything I know about the case I have read through the papers. I don't even know if I'm under investigation."

Rodman said he hasn't been charged, arrested or questioned as of Sunday.

The police are trying to intimidate him into admitting to something related to the case, he said.

"The allegation that I am a drug user is completely unfounded," he said. "I have nothing to hide. I wish they would quit trying to bully us around."