

Fire guts North Wilkesboro business

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A North Wilkesboro firefighter mans a truck as the fire rages.

Fire destroyed the NAPA auto parts store on D Street in North Wilkesboro early Tuesday morning.

According to North Wilkesboro Fire Chief Niki Hamby, the building and its contents were completely ruined.

Hamby, along with State Bureau of Investigation experts probed the cause of the blaze before noon.

The cause was not determined at press time Tuesday.

Business owner Bobby Flowers said the store was secure when it closed at 7 p.m. Monday.

Sometime around midnight the fire erupted. It is believed it started in the rear of the building.

Hamby said special precautions were taking in battling the blaze due to flammable petroleum-based substance, such as paint and cleaners, inside.

"You worry about inhaling dangerous fumes in a fire like this," Hamby said. "Everyone who went in wore an air pack."

No one was injured while fighting the blaze, Hamby said.

North Wilkesboro along with equipment and personnel from Wilkesboro, Cricket, Broadway, Roaring River and Millers Creek fire departments.



Smoke bellows from the roof as water is sprayed onto the flames.

Foam, brought by Millers Creek and Roaring River fire departments, was used to extinguish the chemically fed flames.

Hamby said it took about two hours to control the fire with the use of the foam and water.

Around 3:30 p.m., small blazes continued to erupt from the rear of the building. Water was sprayed from overhead as white-gray pillars of smoke bellowed.

D Street in front of the business was completely blocked from traffic as firefighters worked.

The blaze had been mostly extinguished by between 4:30 a.m. and 5 a.m. except for a few "hot spots," Hamby said.

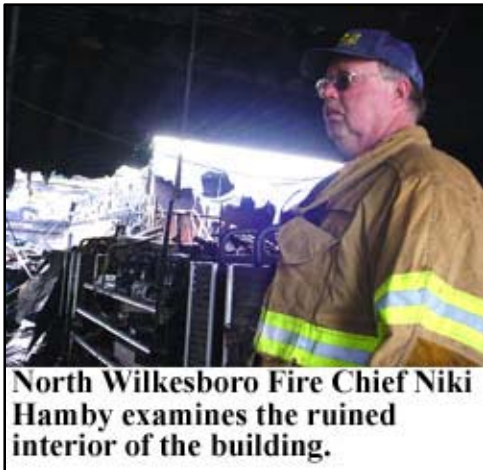
Hamby called the building a total loss.

"When there's that mush fire and heat, it affects the overall structure," he said.

The building is owned by William and Vida Pearson of McGrady, Hamby said.

Hamby wasn't sure how much the building is worth but said that it is estimated that \$600,000 in merchandise was lost.

Flowers on Tuesday afternoon said that the business will be relocating to the former Collins store location across the street by late next week.



North Wilkesboro Fire Chief Niki Hamby examines the ruined interior of the building.

He added that he was doubtful that anything inside the building could be salvaged.

Russ Pearson executive director of the Wilkes/Alleghany Chapter of the American Red Cross said three volunteers - Bobbi Taylor, Charles Macemore, Billy Durham – brought firefighters refreshments early in the morning and then later returned with breakfast.

"We do this during fires," Pearson said. "We come out even if there isn't a family involved."