



Fire officials are suspicious of a fire that destroyed two vehicles and damaged another on 10th Street in Downtown North Wilkesboro on Thursday morning (July 28). Witnesses say they saw a man lean into the gray-colored minivan (shown above) just before the fire began. Record photo by Jerry Lankford.

Car Fires Ruled Suspicious Man seen leaning into vehicle before blaze occurred

By JERRY LANKFORD

Record Editor

A person of interest is being sought in a suspicious fire that destroyed two cars and damaged another in Downtown North Wilkesboro on Thursday morning (July 28).

The fire occurred on 10 th Street , directly across from the Wilkes County Public Library in a town parking area. Although the parking lot was nearly full of cars at the time of the fire, no one was injured, according to North Wilkesboro Fire Chief Niki Hamby.

The fire was reported at 11:04 a.m., Hamby said. It appears it started in the front passenger seat area of a gray minivan owned by Shannon Dillard of Elledge Mill Road, North Wilkesboro.

According to North Wilkesboro Police Chief Joe Rankin, witnesses saw a man lean into the van just before the fire occurred and was spotted walking away from the vehicle on 10 th Street as the fire became fully involved.

“Right now he is a person of interest,” Rankin said.

Hamby said that the vehicle wasn't locked prior to the fire.

Rankin added that witnesses said the man was a white male, wearing a white T-shirt, blue jeans and a red and white ball cap.

On Thursday after noon, Hamby said that the cause of the fire had not been determined.

Employees and patrons of downtown business came outside after hearing several explosions.

“It was real loud,” said a young girl, standing at the corner of Main and 10 th streets. Others lined the alley way near the parking area. Some of those people said they heard two or three explosions that sounded like gunshots. It was speculated that the explosions were caused when the glass in the vehicles broke.

The fire, which gutted the van, spread to a red colored Pontiac car parked next to it. The car was also gutted by fire. A Honda car which was parked nearby received some heat damage as well, Hamby said.

Part of 10 th Street – from Main Street to C Street – was blocked while the fire was contained. Firefighters from the North Wilkesboro Fire Department cleared the scene at 11:41 a.m.