

Fire Heavily Damages The 50s

The 50s restaurant on Main Street in Wilkesboro was heavily damaged by smoke and fire this morning.

The fire in the basement and rear storage room on The 50s started at 9:17 a.m. when a Foothills Sanitation garbage truck serving a dumpster in the alleyway behind the building backed into and broke a power pole holding a three-phase transformer array, according to Wilkesboro Police Major Steve Dowell.

Wilkesboro Fire Assistant Chief Fletcher Reeves said, “The utility pole snapped when it was hit. As the transformers and lines came down, something hit the line to a 120-gallon liquid propane tank and pulled it loose from a fitting. The sparks from all of the lines coming down caused the gas to ignite, and that set the rear of the building on fire.”

Fire spread into the basement, up through the rear of the building, and into the attic.

Wilkesboro firemen responded to the scene, along with trucks and personnel from the North Wilkesboro, Moravian Falls, Cricket and Boomer fire departments, with the Brushy Mountain Fire Department on standby. A Wilkes EMS ambulance was also on standby.

Breakfast customers and the staff at the restaurant were evacuated without injuries.

Firemen concentrated their attack on the rear of the building, while firemen with air packs entered the front of the building to stop the spread of the flames.

North Wilkesboro Fire Chief Niki Hamby said that fire crews were still on the scene at midday. Firemen were working from the attic and the roof to find and extinguish hot spots in the ceiling.

Hamby said that the fire damage in the restaurant was confined to the rear of the building. There was water and heavy smoke damage in the restaurant area. Crews had to pull down ceiling tiles as they searched for hot spots.

According to Town of Wilkesboro tax records, the building is owned by Richard and Elizabeth Horton. The restaurant is operated by Keith Johnson.

The adjoining Foothills Kung-Fu Arnis Academy and the law offices of Bill Gray also suffered smoke damage.

Power outage in downtown

As the lines went down, power arced and created a surge that caused the breakers at the Brooks Street substation (behind the Tyson Foods procession plant) to cut off, disrupting power to 584 customers. That number included most of the business in the downtown area, as well as the

Wilkes County Courthouse and the Wilkes County Office Building, plus most traffic signals in the downtown area.

Duke Energy crews were able to restore power by 10:15 a.m. to all but six customers in the immediate area. Crews were working at midday to reset the broken pole, the transformers and the utility lines.

Wilkesboro Police, with assistance from North Wilkesboro Police and the Wilkes County Sheriff's Department, closed Main Street from West Street (in front of the police department) to Oakwoods Road and diverted traffic around the area. The road reopened at 12:40 p.m.

Wilkesboro firefighters were on the scene until 12:52 p.m.

