

Mimmo's Pizzeria Fire – June 25, 1989

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Fire investigators spent more than five hours combing through debris in an attempt to determine the cause of a fire that gutted Mimmo's Pizza, 11 N. Henry, late Sunday.

Pizzeria Fire Remains Under Investigation

Although investigators sifted through the charred rubble for more than five hours Monday, they still have not been able to pinpoint the cause of a fire that destroyed Mimmo's Pizza.

"We know about where it started, but we're uncertain how," said Edgerton Fire Chief James Neal. "The cause is undetermined."

Fire was detected in the family-owned business at 11 N. Henry about 10:33 p.m. Sunday. When the fire department arrived on the scene, the one-story brick structure was "totally enveloped in flames."

"It was rolling pretty good when we got here," Neal said. "Flames

were shooting out of the front windows (which had been knocked out because of the intense heat)."

One firefighter described the burning inferno as a "ball of fire."

Firefighters remained at the scene until 12:21 a.m.

"I'd say we had the fire under control within 10 minutes of our arrival," Neal said. "We had it knocked down."

Neal said the fire never burned through the ceiling or roof.

"We didn't have any problems to speak of," the fire chief added, noting that the department returned later with a grass fire rig to spray the smoldering embers with water.

Neal listed the contents of the pizzeria a "total loss, and

estimated damages resulting from the fire at \$80,000.

There were no injuries.

Mimmo's, which lists its Sunday hours as 4 p.m. to midnight, was closed when the firefighters arrived.

"All the doors were secured, and everything was locked," Neal noted.

A representative of the state fire marshal's office visited the site shortly after the fire. Investigators with the Department of Criminal Investigation's Arson Bureau returned about 10:15 a.m. and continued to comb through the remains of the gutted business until about 4 p.m.

However, Neal said the findings have been inconclusive.

"Nothing we've found so far points to arson," he said. "We have no reason to believe arson was involved."

Investigators were expected to return to the fire scene Tuesday.

Neal said the fire started in the kitchen area near an oven or underneath a counter.

Investigators are looking at a gas regulator which is in question and a ceiling fan. There are also burn patterns on the floor which have no apparent explanation.

"We've got about three things we're looking at," Neal said.

Edgerton police officers were stationed at the pizzeria to prevent anyone from entering the premises and disturbing any

evidence before the investigation could be complete.

Neal indicated there was very little structural damage to the building, which is owned by Roger and Diane Amundson, 3563 Stone Farm Rd. The ceiling will have to be replaced, but the walls are intact, he added.

There was also minor smoke damage to an adjacent beauty shop, The Looking Glass, 7 N. Henry. Ejectors were used to clear the smoke from the business.

The owners of Mimmo's, Mimmo and Genea Intravala, 1000 Robert, are uncertain about the

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Fire (Cont.)

future.

It was exactly a year ago Sunday that an early morning fire swept through three West Fulton Street businesses—Katy's Cafe, Edgerton Electric Inc. and the Village Inn Restaurant. The Red Baron, 124 W. Fulton, sustained minor water damage.

Firefighters from Edgerton and Stoughton battled the June 26 1988 blaze, which was discovered about 1:30 a.m., for more than six hours.

The total loss from the fire, which was believed to have been started with an electrical malfunction in a storage area at Katy's Cafe, was estimated at \$300,000.

The fire at Mimmo's pizza in downtown Edgerton (11 N. Henry Street) was called in about half an hour after the restaurant closed on a Sunday night. It appeared to start in the kitchen, where the stove may have caused the fire, or at least fed the fire. No official cause was ever determined. The damage was primarily to the ceiling of the restaurant.

Broken Thermostat Could Be Key To Mimmo's Fire

When inspectors concluded their on-site investigation of the Mimmo's Pizza fire last Wednesday, they still had not pinpointed the cause of the blaze that resulted in \$80,000 worth of damage to the business at 11 N. Henry on June 25.

Edgerton Fire Chief Jim Neal, representatives of the state Division of Criminal Investigation's Arson Bureau and two insurance investigators spent three full days examining and re-examining the remains of the fire which gutted the inside of the one-story brick structure.

Neal returned to the fire scene again on Thursday, but with the same results.

"We have nothing more than we found the first night," said Neal, calling the cause of the fire "undetermined at this time."

"Nothing really jumped out at us," he added. "This had those guys (state and insurance investigators) scratching their heads. You know where (the fire started), but you don't know why."

Neal said earlier there was no evidence that arson was involved in the blaze which completely destroyed the equipment and furniture inside the pizzeria.

While investigators are unsure of how the fire was ignited, they are convinced it started in the kitchen area of the restaurant.

"As near as we can tell, that is where it started," Neal said. "That was the hottest spot."

One of the possibilities investigators are taking a close look at is a faulty oven gas regulator, or thermostat, which could have either caused or greatly contributed to the fire.

Neal said fire inspectors are uncertain whether the thermostat was broken earlier or as a result of the fire.

If the thermostat was broken before the fire, Neal said it could have "caused the heat that was needed there" to ignite the blaze.

If the equipment had malfunctioned as a result of the fire, it would have contributed to the blaze by causing gas to build up to the point where a small explosion could have fueled the fire.

"That is one of the things we are quite concerned about," Neal said. "I'm sure it fueled it. Any time you get gas, it's fueling it."

Inspectors with the state took the thermostat with them for further testing.

"I haven't heard anything," Neal said. "I told them, by all

ble cause of the blaze, which kept firefighters busy for nearly two hours.

"It didn't look like it started there," Neal said of the ceiling fan. "It was a low burn to burn the way it did."

Owner Mimmo Intravaia had closed the restaurant at 10 p.m.—about 30 minutes before the Edgerton Fire Department got the fire call. Firefighters remained at the scene until 12:21 a.m.

Though the brick structure is still sound, the wood ceiling in the building was burned severely. The structure was completely

engulfed in flames when firefighters arrived, but Neal estimated his department was able to get the fire under control within 10 minutes.

"I don't know what contributed more, shutting the gas off or the two-inch lines, but we really knocked it down," he said. "It was probably a combination of the two."

Edgerton police officers who responded to the scene concentrated their efforts in evacuating the entire block.

While responding to the fire call, Neal saw a bright orange

glow over the downtown business district as he approached the fire station and initially thought the fire was located at the Carlton restaurant and lounge located across the street from the pizza parlor on Henry Street.

"I got to the station and (dispatcher-driver Edward Hartzel) said it was a sign at Mimmo's," Neal recalled. "I said 'it's more than a sign.'"

"It's good that nobody got hurt," he added. "That is the main thing. You can replace these things (lost in the fire), but you can't replace lives."