

Edgewood Glen Apartment Building Fire – May 28, 2012

At the end of a three-day holiday weekend, Edgerton and Milton Fire Departments were busy battling two structure fires and handling a lake rescue. A storm had gone through the area with lightning and high winds. Lightning struck a 21-unit, senior living, apartment complex on Edgerton's north side, causing a large fire. About half an hour later, Edgerton was called to a house fire on Hillside Road, also believed to be due to a lightning strike. Earlier in the day Milton was called to a rescue on Lake Koshkonong near Bingham's Point. Winds had reached 70 mph that day.

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Apartment house damaged by fire

By Mark Scarborough
Reporter Staff

A lightning strike about 6:30 p.m. Monday, May 28, helped start a fire that left behind a massive, ragged, smoldering hole in the roof of a 21-unit apartment complex at 105 Thronson Drive in Edgerton.

Although the fire seemed mainly contained by about 7:30 p.m., firefighters and police officers remained on the scene of the Edgewood Glen Senior Living Community blaze until about midnight.

Located in an area behind the Piggly Wiggly grocery store, the fire at Edgewood Glen attracted mutual aid assistance from 15 fire departments throughout southern Wisconsin and northern Illinois, including Cambridge, Stoughton, Evansville, Whitewater, Beloit, Brooklyn, Deerfield, Footville, DeForest, Janesville, Milton, Brodhead, Turtle, and Fitchburg in Wisconsin and Rockton in Illinois.

Mother's apartment destroyed

Spectators gathered across Main Street from the fire, snapping pictures and trading news. Complicating the work of emergency workers were the after-effects of a severe thunderstorm that pushed through southern Wisconsin, including sheets of rain and wild winds.

At the edge of the Piggly Wiggly parking lot, Edgerton's Cathie Astin told the Edgerton Reporter that her 81-year-old mother, Yvonne Oaks, had lived in the Edgewood Glen apartment where the lightning struck.

"She said she was fixing supper when lightning hit the roof," Astin said. "It almost threw her on the floor. She grabbed her lock box and her purse and took off."

Mrs. Oaks' apartment was a total loss, Astin added. "Her apartment is ruined," Astin said. "I don't think there's anything left. She lost everything. But I told her, 'You know what, Mom? You're alive.' She can make more quilts. We all have pictures (of the family) we can give her."

Edgerton's Margo Oaks, watching the scene from the parking lot of the Subway restaurant on Main Street, was surprised when told by a journalist that her mother-in-law Yvonne's apartment was apparently ground zero of the fire. "That's terrible," she said. "It's amazing, though, all these trucks they've got. It just blows your mind."

Mrs. Oaks' family initially heard about the fire through her granddaughter – Tiana Eastman, daughter of Jim Eastman – who found a real-time Facebook posting that noted that the apartment building was on fire.

Mrs. Oaks spent the evening with her son, Dan.

Help: grocery store, pharmacy

Also on the scene was Courtney Schultz, Milton, who worried about Ken Kirby and Cindy Kirby, her relatives, who were both emergency medical technicians working at the scene. "Every time they go out on a call, I worry," Schultz said.

Clark Delzer, 18-year-old senior at Edgerton High School, was working as a cashier at the grocery store at about 6:30 p.m. Monday when he heard a "really loud crash, like someone had dropped a window pane."

Soon after, "everybody started rolling into the parking lot" at Piggly Wiggly, checking out the fire next door, Delzer said. "It was kind of crazy."



Firefighters battle a blaze at the Edgewood Glen Senior Living Community, 105 Thronson Drive, on Memorial Day, May 28. Emergency workers from fire departments throughout southern Wisconsin and northern Illinois responded to the call for mutual aid to fight the fire. (Photo courtesy of the Edgerton Fire Protection District/Leonard Mueller)

Residents of Edgewood Glen came to the grocery store. "We made sure they were OK," Delzer said. "We got their names and got them something to eat or drink. All the Piggly employees were there, doing what they could to help. It was nice that we were able to do that."

Fire engines and ambulances clogged the parking lot of the grocery store, which was used as a staging area for the emergency workers who responded to the fire.

On Monday evening at Piggly Wiggly, Rite-Way school buses arrived to ferry residents to another lo-

cation. The buses were not needed, however, as most residents found temporary homes with relatives.

At about the same time, the Edgerton Pharmacy opened its doors to provide drug prescriptions to residents who had lost their prescriptions in the fire.

Extent of loss at Edgewood

Of Edgewood Glen's 21 apartments, 20 were occupied, according to Dave Witcraft, an official connected to Metes and Bounds, a Minnesota firm that owns the apartment complex.

There were 24 residents who lived at the apartment house, but seven were not at home at the time of the fire, noted Cindy Goldthorp, Madison, regional manager for the firms that own the apartment complex.

Metes and Bounds expects to rebuild the apartment complex, although the work may take as long as four to six months, Witcraft said May 30. Insurance adjusters are still determining the amount of loss, he added. The dollar amount is not yet known, he said.

The firm had full insurance on the building, Witcraft said.

"We will be getting bids from contractors," he added. "We have to redo our building plans and get them certified again by the state."

All residents escaped without injury, according to Brian Demrow, chief of the Edgerton Fire Protection District.

"Everybody is safe and everybody is in real good spirits," Witcraft said. "This is just another step we have to make as we grow old."

Fire chief's perspective

"I think everyone did a great job

(Continued on page 3)

Apartment fire

(Continued from page 1)



A crowd gathers on Main Street during the May 28 fire behind the Piggy Wiggly grocery store. (Edgerton Reporter photo)

of getting the fire stopped and working together with the other departments," Demrow said about his firefighters. Most members of the Edgerton Fire Protection District are volunteers, so they worked until the early hours of Tuesday morning, then got a few hours of sleep before they had to get up and go to work at their regular jobs, Demrow noted.

The state fire marshal and the city building inspector examined the Edgewood Glen building on Tuesday, Demrow said. Until the findings of these officials are known, the official cause of the fire, as well as the extent and dollar amount of the damage at the structure, will not be determined, the chief said.

According to Ryan Beckwith, assistant chief of the Edgerton Fire Protection District, the city's building inspector told owners of the structure on May 29 that it was safe to enter the building to retrieve personal belongings. The cause of the fire has officially been labeled "undetermined," Beckwith said. Investigators are expected to offer additional information on the fire's cause in the near future, he added.

Taking pictures of the Edgewood Glen fire from the vantage point of her friend Jake Keinbaum's Thronson Drive house, directly across from the apartment complex, was Casey Carey, 23, of the Jefferson County town of Sumner. "It broke my heart, with all those senior citizens losing the possessions of a lifetime," she said. "It was just so sad."

Another fire on Hillside

About half an hour after firefighters started battling the blaze at Edgewood Glen — with explosive doses of water from fire engine hoses delivered from the bird's-eye vantage point of a bucket on top of an extended ladder truck — Edgerton firefighters were racing toward a structure fire at 170 Hillside Road in the Dane County town of Albion.

No injuries were reported at the Hillside Road fire, Demrow said. The cause of the blaze, also being investigated by the state fire marshal, was not immediately known.

The fire does not appear to be suspicious, according to Ryan Beckwith, assistant chief of the Edgerton Fire District.

Earlier in the day, Milton firefighters also responded to a water rescue on Lake Koshkonong near

Bingham Point. Winds in the area were reported as approaching 70 mph. Trees and limbs fell throughout the Edgerton area.

Responding to several fires simultaneously, while battling a major blaze, is something the Edgerton department hasn't had to face since the 1990s or 1980s, Demrow added.

Future help needed

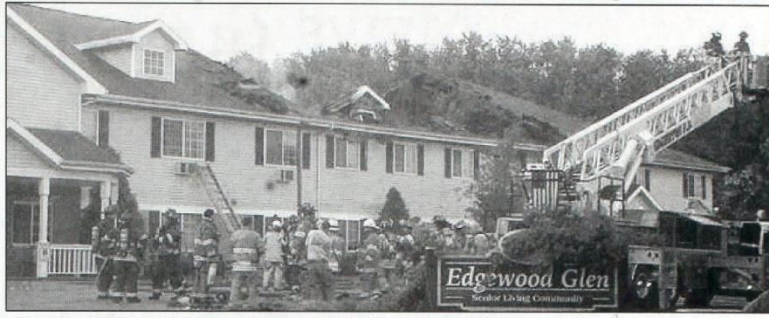
At the Edgerton Community Outreach charity on May 29, Executive Director Sarah Williams explained that the American Red Cross was expected to provide motel vouchers for apartment house residents that might eventually need lodging elsewhere. However, the Red Cross would only provide three nights of lodging.

Once those resources were consumed, Outreach could provide some additional lodging vouchers, Williams said. The local charity's resources are limited, however, she added.

People wishing to help residents of the Edgewood Glen apartments can send checks or cash to Edgerton Community Outreach, making sure to designate that the contributions are to benefit Edgewood Glen apartment dwellers, Williams said.

Residents of Edgewood Glen who need clothing can come to the Outreach store on Main Street and select what they need for free, Williams added.

"My guess is that we will need money, both for rent payments and for security deposits for new apartments," Williams said. "There aren't a lot of vacancies similar to what those residents are used to living in. A month's rent and a security deposit can add up pretty quickly."



A May 28 fire at 105 Thronson Drive's Edgewood Glen Senior Living Community in Edgerton attracted firefighters and onlookers from throughout southern Wisconsin.



Twenty of the twenty-one units in the apartment building were damaged. The owners of the building restored it and it wasn't long before senior citizens once again called it home. From the August 29, 2012, issue of the Edgerton Reporter:

Edgewood Glen restoration begins

By Michael Gouvion
Reporter Staff

SERVPRO of Beloit, Wis., is set to begin the main restoration process on the Edgewood Glen Senior Apartments, located at 105 Thronson Dr., this week.

Edgewood Glen experienced a fire caused by a lightning strike back on May 28. Damages from the blaze totaled around \$1 million.

Project manager Tim Weber said SERVPRO has been doing little things here and there in the past few months but an unexpected delay occurred trying to organize everything from individual contractors to insurance companies.

The anticipated completion date for the restoration is now Jan. 1,

2013.

Weber said Nelson Truss of Edgerton was planning to deliver the trusses for the building Monday. Other local companies involved include Clift Plumbing, Eager Beaver Construction and Air Care Specialists. J.F. Ahern Co. and Richter Electric, Janesville, are also involved.

About 80 percent of the roof will be replaced, saving about 46 feet of the roof on the north end of the building. The building will be constructed the same as it was before, Weber added.

The cost of the restoration is not completely available at this time.

Cindy Goldthorpe, who works for Metes & Bounds Management Co., which owns the building, said several residents have moved away

permanently, so more units will be available. Goldthorpe encouraged people who are interested in living in Edgewood Glen once it reopens to contact Gail Lindsey at (608) 884-2680 to receive more information on how to apply.

"We're looking forward to getting everybody back home," Goldthorpe said. Nobody is currently residing in the building.

Many residents lost belongings in the blaze but Edgerton residents Andy and Kelly Aleson, who own Advanced Restoration DKI, Madison, have been helping many of the residents with cleaning expertise, materials, supplies and labor, all for free.

(Continued on page 14)



SERVPRO began the main restoration project on the Edgewood Glen Senior Apartments on Monday, beginning with the tearing down and rebuilding of about 80 percent of the roof. Edgewood Glen was set ablaze in May after being struck by lightning. (Edgerton Reporter photo/Michael Gouvion)

One year later, Edgewood Glen gleams

By Jeff Brown
Reporter staff

When you walk into the lounge at the Edgewood Glen Senior Living Community apartments on Thronson Drive, just north of Piggly Wiggly, you smell new paint and carpet and see new honey-colored cabinets and furniture. Over in the corner sits a brand-new refrigerator, and the stainless steel faucet sparkles.

It's quite a change from 15 months ago, when residents crept back into the building to retrieve their belongings 48 hours after a blast of early summer lightning struck the roof and sparked a fire that left a black, jagged sixty-by-eighty-foot hole in the rafters on Memorial Day.

The acrid smell of smoke hung in the air, and sooty water stains covered the walls and tiles. Mucky piles of sodden drywall, soaked and blasted apart by fire hoses, covered the floor of several apartments upstairs near the hole in the roof. It was a sad scene.

"It was just like a war zone," said Ellie Reukauf one of five residents who sat down with me last week in the lounge to talk about the fire and its aftermath. Reukauf was in her apartment cooking hamburgers for her and her son, who was visiting when the fire began. When she came back two days later, everything in her apartment was just as she'd left it, including the hamburgers, sitting in a film of grease in a pan on the stove, half-cooked.

Barb Boettge wasn't so lucky. Her apartment was closer to where the fire raged before firefighters from the Edgerton Fire Protection District and fire departments as far away as Deerfield and South Beloit, Illinois put it out. There, the scene was almost surreal.

Firefighters cut a hole in the ceiling to let down three feet of water that had collected in the apartment above hers. "It was just like this tidal wave," said Boettge. "You could see where it hit in the bathroom. It just went up the tub and splashed the whole thing with dirty, sooty water."

Even stranger were big bubbles that hung down where the latex paint on the ceiling swelled with water. "They were like bags of water hanging everywhere," said Boettge. She kept a wary eye on them as she packed up the few belonging she was able to salvage. "You'd be packing up, and all of a sudden it would just burst and water would go everywhere."

At least Boettge and Reukauf could get into their apartments. Not so—Chuck Buchanan and his wife Jean, whose apartment was upstairs, right beneath one of two dormers between which the fire raged. "They thought it was going to cave in. They didn't want nobody near it," said Chuck Buchanan of the dormer. He said fire fighters told him his guns were in their cases, floating in two feet of water.

The fire caused extensive water

and smoke damage, but each of the building's 25 residents escaped unharmed.

Not, it turns out, without some heroism.

"Chuck saved my life," said Boettge. She, Buchanan, and Stanley Jensen were the only three people left in their apartments or the inner hallway of the building when the lightning hit. The rest, including property manager Gail Lindsay, were clustered in the building's lobby, watching the skies for funnel clouds and waiting for the signal to head to the basement as a wide band of ominous black thunderclouds moved over the Edgerton area.

"I knew something was wrong when I heard that thunder," said Buchanan. Suddenly, out of the midst of the thunder, came a flash of white light and an instantaneous crack. It was ear-splitting.

Boettge was watching "Wheel of Fortune" when the lightning hit. "I heard the noise and saw a tree branch fall, and I was waiting for the tornado siren to go off," said Boettge. "About ten to seven I looked up at my living room window and saw white smoke going by, and I thought, 'Wow, somebody's really got the dryer on high.' Then I looked out the door and Chuck's coming down the hallway from the lobby he said 'Get out, the whole building's on fire.'"

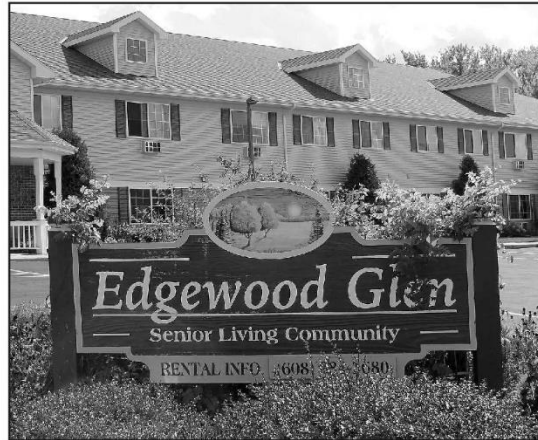
Buchanan did the same thing for Jensen, who lived upstairs next door to the Buchanans. Buchanan helped Jensen out of his apartment and down the stairs, but not before Jensen went back to his apartment to retrieve an envelope full of cash he had set aside for a visit to the Ho-Chunk casino in Madison the next day.

Residents huddled in the parking lot, by now filled with 30 fire trucks and ambulances. Firefighters helped Lindsay move the residents to the parking lot at Piggly Wiggly so she could count them and make sure nobody was missing. Thankfully, nobody was.

Employees from Piggly Wiggly pitched in. "They brought us water to everybody, they brought donuts," said Boettge. "They stayed open late just for us, so we had a place to go until people could get picked up by relatives," said Lindsay. Lindsay said Edgerton Pharmacy also stayed open late to allow residents to replace their prescriptions.

After waiting two days to get back into their apartments and salvage what they could, many of the residents stayed at Comfort Inn in Newville for two weeks while they worked out new living arrangements. Most took with them only what they were wearing and a few essentials, like toothbrushes. They were told it would be months before Edgewood Glen was habitable again.

Many moved in with relatives. Maxine Armes stayed with her son in Newville. Reukauf stayed with her daughter in Edgerton. Boettge moved in with her son in Florida for three months. The Buchanans lived



Life has returned to a happy normal at Edgewood Glen Senior Living Community, fifteen months after lightning struck the roof over Memorial Day weekend last May and started a fire that forced residents to evacuate the building and live elsewhere for seven months. The lightning struck the roof between the two dormers on the right.

(Edgerton Reporter photo/Jeff Brown)

at Fulton Square in downtown Edgerton, where management kindly offered them a short-term lease.

It was three months before work began on repairing the roof and restoring the inside of the building, a delay Lindsay blamed on haggling between the building's owner, their insurance company, and contractors.

"It was too long," said Reukauf. "We thought it would be a couple of three months at the most, and it just went on and on." Boettge, who moved back with her daughter in Edgerton in October of 2012, said she used to come and stare longingly at the building, anxiously anticipating the day when she could move back in.

That day finally came on Decem-

ber 28, 2012. Piggly Wiggly came through again, donating a large fruit basket and \$100 gift card for the building's grand re-opening.

Some of the residents didn't come back, and only twelve of the buildings twenty apartments were full. More people have moved in since, and now there are only three apartments vacant, said Lindsay.

Lindsay said the fire brought the Edgewood Glen community closer together. "The people who liked it best here came back," said Lindsay. "For other people who had been grumbling, it was their chance to break their lease. We couldn't hold them to their lease, because nobody could live here."