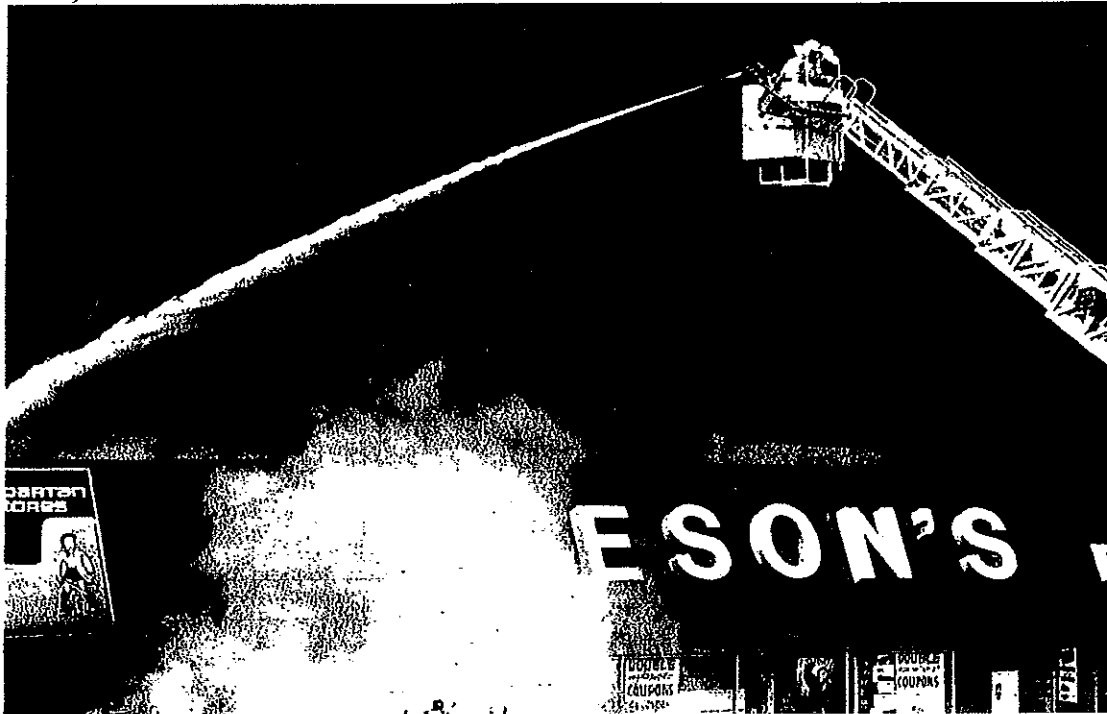


Groceries

OLSON'S FOOD STORE FIRE 1995
Bay View Road
Petoskey, Emmet County, Michigan
{now Kilwins Chocolate Kitchen and Tours}

OLESON'S: WE WILL REBUILD

Petoskey News-Review
Monday, March 6, 1995



Petoskey firefighters spray the roof of Oleson's Food Store from their aerial truck as black smoke engulfs the area Friday. {News-Review photo by G. Randall Goss}

GETTING OUT

Employees Made Sure Customers Were Safe

By Tamara Stevens, News-Review Staff Writer

As fire spread in the meat department of Oleson's Food Store Friday, employees and contractors in the store worked to get customers out.

Employees helped customers out of the store after the announcement was made over the loudspeaker that the building was on fire.

"The employees did a very good job of getting everybody in the store out," said LaMar Eby, owner of Eby Construction.

Eby was in Oleson's replacing ceiling tiles when the fire started.

"They yelled out of the meat room and put an announcement on the intercom," Eby said.

Eby got down off his ladder and went to the back of the store to see what was going on.

"At that point, customers weren't paying much attention," Eby said. Many customers continued to shop, he suspects because people hear so many false alarms these days.

"They were getting a last few items, probably thinking they could check out," Eby said. "The employees went around to every person in the store and let them know it was

for real and that they had to leave immediately."

Employees were ushering elderly customers directly to the door, Eby said.

After customers were out of the store, it would have been easy for the store employees to leave, but they checked out all the break areas and the rest of the store to be sure everybody was out, Eby said.

"They hung in real well," Eby said.

"I owe it to the fast action of my employees that nobody got hurt," said store manager Craig Antoine. "They were super."

By the time Eby and others were leaving the store, the firefighters were entering. That's when they heard the glass in the meat department explode.

The fire quickly spread throughout the store.

Eby and another gentleman went down to the neighboring paint store and laundromat and alerted them of the fire and the need to evacuate.

"Craig (Antoine) was going to do that, but I told him to stay with his employees and that I'd do it," Eby said.

COST ESTIMATED AT \$2.5 - \$3 MILLIAN

By Tamara Stevens, News-Review Staff Writer

Don J. Oleson, general manager of Oleson's Food Stores, stood face-to-face with the earliest flames of the fire that destroyed the family store Friday, a store he said the company plans to rebuild.

Oleson and the manager of the meat department, Victor Urman, battled a grease fire in the smoker of the meat department with fire extinguishers.

"We used two extinguishers," Oleson said. "The second one ran out of juice, that was the problem."

Oleson said by the time the second extinguisher gave out, the flames were hitting the ceiling.

"We contained it the meat room and went to get the employees and customers out of the store," Oleson said.

Oleson told reporters at the scene Friday that fighting the flames was "pretty traumatic."

The store was a healthy, productive one for the five-store Oleson Food Stores chain. It employed 50 people, not all of whom were working at the time of the fire.

Don Oleson said Friday it will cost \$2.5 to \$3 million to replace the store.

"Hopefully we will rebuild as soon as possible," Oleson said today. "Right now we're working with the insurance company and nothing is cast in stone."

"We're devastated that our employees are out of jobs right now, and they are our main concern right now," Oleson said. The 50 employees will be put on laid-off status and will be able to collect unemployment while the firm rebuilds the store.

Oleson's builder presently is on vacation and has all of Oleson's answers as to how long it will take to rebuild, he said.

The firm is also concerned about all its valued customers.

"We hope to see them back when we reopen," Oleson said.

Oleson said he is thankful for the work of the firefighters.

"I must say that the fire department was great," Oleson said.

Construction companies are working today to clear debris and allow store officials to reach the safe, which fell through the floor and was resting in the basement. They are also working to remove Freon from the store's cooling units.

Craig Antoine, store manager, said today that he and other employees were working to minimize the damage to the remainder of the store (the basement).

Oleson's Plaza was originally built and developed in 1963 by Chet Crago. The Cragos sold the plaza to Don and Jerry Oleson in August 1975. Oleson's also owns two stores in Traverse City, one in Charlevoix and Manistee.

BUSINESSES NEARBY ALSO FEARED THE WORST

Bryon Mesner thought his store was lost along with Oleson's Food Store, which burned to the ground Friday.

"I didn't think they could save it," said Mesner, owner of the Mariner Coin Laundry and Cleaners. "But they did. I really appreciate the work they did and all the volunteers saving what they could from the store."

Mesner said it took only about 10 minutes for firefighters and other volunteers to empty his store of customers' dry cleaning, tables and paperwork.

Today the laundromat is scrubbing down from smoke damage and plans to reopen Tuesday, March 7.

Tallberg Chevrolet-Olds-Geo kept a wary eye on the smoke and decided to move their entire new car lot — 100-150 vehicles — to a temporary home at the Petoskey Winter Sports Park as a precaution. General manager Dave Kring said everyone at the business, from office workers to technicians, pitched in. (See picture on page 3.)

The cars were back on the lot Saturday.

— Neil Stilwell

• More
on the
fire at
Oleson's,
pages 2,
3 and 5.

OLSON'S FOOD STORE FIRE

Friday, March 3, 1995



OLSON'S FOOD STORE FIRE

Friday, March 3, 1995

