

Fire in Felton



Dan Coyro

Firefighters spray the smoldering embers of the Felton Community Hall.

Blaze destroys Community Hall

By STEVE PEREZ
Sentinel staff writer

FELTON — Flames tore through the Felton Community Hall Thursday afternoon, destroying a meeting place that local groups have used since 1927. More than 50 volunteers and firefighters were called in from as far away as the mid-county area to fight the inferno that also threatened neighboring buildings.

Despite their efforts, within half an hour, a building that was the central meeting point for

countless organizations and thousands of people in the closely-knit mountain community had been reduced to a burned-out hulk.

Felton Fire Chief Don Ramos, the only paid staffer in the all-volunteer department, was in his office in the fire station next door at 131 Kirby St., when flames were spotted.

"A guy knocked at the front door and said 'there's a fire across the street' " I ran out to the corner, looked and didn't see anything and as I came back, I stopped and saw the flames at

the right corner of the hall."

Ramos dialed 911 and county dispatchers paged the 35 or so volunteers at 3:42 p.m.

Units from Scotts Valley, Boulder Creek, Ben Lomond, Zayante and the California Department of Forestry also responded.

The flames pushed by afternoon winds, spread within a matter of minutes throughout the aged, wooden building.

Felton volunteer Tony Howard said that when he arrived on the scene from his job at Kelly Services in Santa Cruz, volunteers

were being aided by passersby in laying hose lines and aiming streams of water at the blaze.

The flames threatened to engulf neighboring structures, including the fire department itself, Ramos said.

"We just concentrated on keeping it from spreading," he said.

The north wall of the building collapsed at the height of the blaze and flames shot out across Kirby street and close to a pizza store, said Tom Miller, another volunteer.

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Crews keep the fire from spreading to nearby structures.

Hall will be rebuilt

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A second alarm was declared and units from Central, Aptos-La Selva, Santa Cruz and Branciforte fire departments answered the call.

Damage was estimated at \$100,000 and the cause is under investigation, Ramos said.

Lost in the blaze were chairs, a piano and some stage equipment.

"It's inconvenienced a hell of a lot of people," said Community Hall Board member C.F. Nichols.

He said the hall was rented out as a meeting hall, weddings, and dances, including the annual Felton Fire Dinner Dance.

"We'll rebuild," he said. "We'll take a good look at the insurance

(policy) and put something up because the community needs it."

One Felton resident loudly suggested that what the burgeoning community may also need is full-time firefighters.

"It's disgusting, we have a fire station right next door and no one to man the engines," said an angry Tia Scott-Warren.

She said she had talked to local merchants who agreed the time may have come for the community to vote itself an increase in fees to fund more paid firefighters in the Felton Fire Protection District.

Her grandfather was a Felton fire volunteer and had participat-

ed in events at the old hall, Scott-Warren said.

"It hurts," she said. "It's just another thing on memory lane that's gone. We need to take care of special memories, special things, and if this doesn't wake the town up, I don't know what's going to do it."

Ramos would not comment on the staffing question, saying it was a "political issue," but he did praise the work of the volunteers in keeping the fire from spreading.

"They did a hell of a job," he said. "The community can be proud of the firefighters they have, because they work hard and are as good as, or better than paid people."