

Destruction of Dobbins' effect on 2010 renovations

Fires have history at Behrend

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Monday night's fire in the Dobbins Dining Hall at Penn State Behrend may have damaged something aside from just the Gazebo. At the very least, says Marketing Communications Director William Gonda, it has certainly pushed back the renovation plan.

"The west end of the building is entirely destroyed," Gonda said. "It remains to be seen if the east end is even salvageable, and if so, what type of effort or repairs would need to be put into it."

Gonda said that no college or university officials have entered the structure, so it is premature to tell if the building will continue with its renovation or be entirely demolished and rebuilt.

"At this point nobody other than the fire Marshall and the commanding fire official have been in the building yet," he said. "If the building is salvageable in some part, then this fire at least certainly delays the project's completion."

Gonda says that the first priority is not the renovation or repair of the building. Rather, school officials simply want to make sure that the building is safe.

"What we will do now is

make sure the area is secure and safe," he said. "We want to take care of any dangers. There are so many people passing through the area, we need to secure the site."

Gonda stressed that there is no indication that the building

will collapse, but the fire Marshall has yet to determine whether the structure is entirely secure. That conclusion may not come for several days.

The renovation project was planned to accomplish two goals: expand food options in

the dining hall and make better use of the space already there.

An addition on the upper side of the building was planned, but is now pushed back indefinitely because a large amount of structural damage has occurred right at the place where the addition would have connected.

Additions to food services, according to the original plans of the renovation, would add a "Caribbean" section, a "home-style" cooking section, an additional grill section, expanded Wok station, and a different salad bar. The renovation also planned for a new roof, new utilities, a new elevator, and kitchen equipment to be added to the building. Also on the docket was a special events dining room and a catering office, which would add to the building's usefulness and versatility.

The stairwells, which Director of Housing and Food Services Randy Geering last year called "disgusting," were also on the list of areas to renovate.



Daniel Smith / The Behrend Beacon

Dobbins was undergoing renovations prior to the fire and will need extensive renovations in the future.

Feb. 13, 1975 -- Lawrence Hall residents did not believe a real fire was occurring. However, a false alarm days earlier faked residents into believing another prank was taking place when pandemonium struck with black smoke filling the Lawrence Hall hallways. The source of the smoke was found to be a smoke-bomb that set off fire alarms.

Feb. 20, 1975 -- Perry Hall night Assistant Bob Lowry was alerted by a female student that she believed a fire had started inside of the building. The fire started in a trash can near the women's first floor laundry room. Rick ShROUT and Mike Kahl evacuated Perry Hall while Lowry extinguished the fire.

Apr. 21, 1977 -- Student John Skoff reported and sparked the extinguishing mission of a fire near Devils Backbone in the Wintergreen Gorge. Skoff informed campus Safety and Security while the Brookside Fire Department reported to the scene. Student volunteers, 14 exactly, got the fire under control before the Brookside Fire Department arrived.

Feb. 25, 1982 -- Perry Hall's second-floor T.V. lounge was destroyed after a fire was sparked in the room. The entire building evacuated in minutes, but smoke inside the building left it inaccessible for students. The fire was caused by a smoldering cigarette.

Sept. 29, 1988 -- A garbage can fire at 2:03 a.m. in the basement of Niagara Hall evacuated students from the building. The fire was put out, but it was never determined who started the fire.

Track team loses its after-practice dining spot

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When Dobbins Dining Hall went up in flames, the Penn State Behrend track and field team lost more than a place to get a filling meal.

They lost a place to congregate and build a stronger team relationship.

For the track and field team, Dobbins was a place to get together after practice, fill up on a high calorie meal and spend time with fellow teammates.

Now, with Dobbins left completely unusable, the team is left to find a new hangout spot. Assistant coach and graduate

student Phil Stuczynski learned about the fire shortly after it started, and everyone's safety was his main concern.

"I got a call at about 12:30 a.m.," said Stuczynski. "I just wanted to make sure that everyone was ok."

Stuczynski addressed that the loss of Dobbins is a disheartening feeling.

"It's really sad," said Stuczynski. "Dobbins is where everybody goes after practice."

The track and field team has not gotten used to the idea that they will no longer be able to convene at the dining hall.

"It's probably not going to hit us until after practice," said

senior Vinnie Krawiec. "I'm sure somebody will slip up after practice and say, 'let's go to Dobbins'."

For right now, the makeshift dining hall set up in McGarvey Commons will have to do.

"I guess McGarvey is sounding ok," said Krawiec. "I guess we can always go to Bruno's."

Even though a place to hangout was a major benefit of Dobbins, the food served there was a very important thing for the track and field members.

"The amount of food we could get there was really important," said freshman David Suhan.

"As athletes, we have to con-

sume large amounts of food and a lot more calories than most people. We got that at Dobbins."

Although Bruno's is an alternative for a meal, it is not ideal for athletes.

"Bruno's is not as good, because a lot of the food made there is fried," said Suhan. "At Dobbins we could get the foods that aren't fried."

Head coach Greg Cooper stressed the importance of eating all meals, even if dining areas are busy.

"We are encouraging the team to be smart, and to not skip any meals just because there's a long line," said

Cooper.

Cooper is also pleased with the outstanding response by the Housing and Food Service.

"It's crazy, this is something you really can't plan for," said Cooper.

"I think the Housing and Food Services did a great job in getting something set up in McGarvey."

As far as the team having a place to hangout is concerned, it is just a waiting game.

"We're just playing it by ear," said Cooper.

"There's not another large location that's not in use right now, so we'll just have to see."

Student firefighters gain experience in Gazebo emergency

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Brookside fire department, manned by several Behrend students, was one of the first departments to arrive at the scene where Dobbins Dining Hall was slowly becoming engulfed in flames.

Student fire fighters junior Adam Hartwig and his sophomore roommate Kyle Liebold were one of the first to arrive at the scene. They were joined by fellow sophomore Bill Gorol.

Hartwig, who has been a volunteer firefighter for two years, has never responded to a call quite like this one.

Most of his other calls were EMS calls, not major fires such as the Dobbins fire.

"A call on campus is different because you have the potential to take someone into the hospital that you know. It affects you a little more because you're a part of it. The only thing different was the fact that there are students everywhere," Hartwig said.

"When you get to a fire on, say, a motor vehicle accident, you're busy going about your

assigned tasks, you're always aware of your surroundings but if there's a major significance to the call you kind of forget it; you're focused on getting the job done."

According to him, this was one of the quickest structural fires he had ever seen.

Many problems resulted in getting the flames controlled quickly because the fire hydrants were buried under several feet of snow.

"At the beginning of the year, if I had to predict a major fire in Erie, it would be Behrend because of the number of old buildings on campus," said Hartwig.

Gorol, a seven year volunteer fireman veteran, quickly responded to the fire mostly thanks to his girlfriend, who was one of the first Behrend students to witness the flames at Dobbins.

"I didn't even realize there were no sprinkler systems in Dobbins, and was probably one of the reasons that it went up in flames pretty quick," Gorol said.

"The roof was rocking pretty good when we got there, and we had no water for twenty minutes."

Having this fire under control

in under an hour was pretty outstanding, compared to the usual three hours on a normal house fire.

Brookside fire department was on the scene, along side five other departments, within minutes of the call, and led to the quick containment of the fire.

Firefighters knew the Gazebo was a complete loss as soon as they arrived on the scene, and fighters quickly mobilized to keeping the fire to spreading to near by Lawrence and Porcupine Hall.

Sophomore Liebold has only been a volunteer firefighter for a year, but quickly gained experience on this campus call. Brookside fire department rarely responds to structural fires this big; a house fire a month is the usual response call for Brookside.

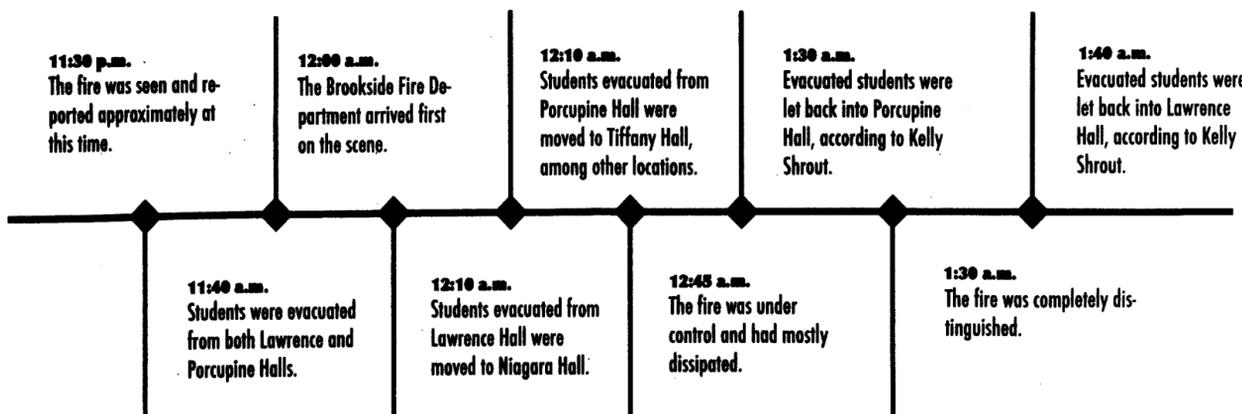
"It was different, with other structure fires, there are usually only six or seven people watching," Liebold said. "It felt really different as an entire campus watched you work."

These were just a few of the many student volunteer firefighters on the scene and should be commemorated for their dedicated work.



Daniel Smith / The Behrend Beacon

Bill Gorol, sophomore, gained experience assisting the Brookside Fire Department in putting out the fire.



In a matter of three short hours, the Gazebo at Dobbins was destroyed.