

DEALING WITH THE AFTERMATH ONE YEAR LATER

A New Beginning



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Staff Writer

The cost of an April 3, 2007, fire that destroyed a downtown Burlingame business cannot be measured simply by dollars and cents. The impact it has had on the downtown business district has been significant as well. Despite the physical devastation, the town's community spirit and desire to help immediately kicked in, before the blaze was at its height of destruction. That spirit played a significant role in restoring one of the businesses.

The fire began in a former ceramics shop, 115 Santa Fe, which was totally destroyed by the blaze. The two businesses adjoining the shop, Aunt B's restaurant and Dr. John Davis' chiropractic clinic, suffered extensive damage in what was ruled an incendiary fire, a fire set by human means.

Reflecting on the event one year later, one will see how business owners and caring residents have come together to rebuild.

The Blaze

On the night of the fire, concern for smoke damage to a nearby business, Great Plains Quilt Company, was enough that Burlingame citizens jumped to action almost immediately. Friends and acquaintances began helping owner Kathy Smith by removing bolts of material and equipment from the store to a nearby garage, as firefighters battled the growing fire a few stores away.

"Everything that could have been destroyed by that

fire was saved, except for three to four bolts of cloth," Smith said. "I was back in business about a month to the day of the fire."

Most of the smoke damage was between the ceiling and the suspended ceiling. The suspended ceiling was removed, the ceiling cleaned, electrical fixtures reinstalled and ceiling fans replaced. Carpets were cleaned and walls scrubbed and repainted.

"The insurance company was great, they worked with us very well," she said. "The claim could have been larger if it weren't for all the Burlingame citizens moving everything out ... cloth, supplies, quilts and so on."

In addition to insurance particulars, dealing with the fire's aftermath proved to be an ordeal.

"I will never hear that someone had 'just smoke damage' and think of it in the same way again," Smith said. "Because that was a mess. There were times I thought, maybe it would have been easier to just ..." her words trailing off to thoughts of what could have been an entirely different outcome.

"The clean-up from just smoke damage was incredible," she said.

She said quilters, Burlingame residents, her family and friends are very kind, caring people. She had many e-mails, calls and letters while her store was closed, asking how things were going, when she would open and if they could help. When the clean-up was complete and she was ready to move the equipment and supplies

back to the store, word got out to her quilting friends. Many gladly lent a helping hand.

"I have been so impressed with how people have tried to help," Smith said. "The city utility rebate, the grant money that First State Bank got to help us, the supportive people in Burlingame, all the people who have no special interest in a quilt shop. They were there to help me get back going and went out of their way to spread the word that I was open again."

The fire has caused Smith and her husband, Larry, to be more alert and anxious about the quilt store. Larry calls often to check on her, and at closing time she has repeatedly checked to be sure everything is turned off.

Sometimes that isn't enough.

Larry has accompanied her to the store late at night to triple check those "off" switches.

"I have realized more clearly that what you do or don't do can affect someone else profoundly and possibly destroy someone else," Smith said.

Rebuilding

Melissa Atwood, owner of the Davis Chiropractic building, is just beginning to obtain bids for repair of her roof, among other repairs. Her building was attached to Smith's building and received significant damage from the fire.

"We tore out some sheet rock that had water damage that caused some mold,"

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Burlingame



Thanks to a Jones Foundation grant and a donation from the Ramskill Family for their generous help rehabilitate the city swimming pool.



Burlingame City Hall



Founded in 1854, Burlingame's history is still seen by touring the city's residential and business district.



Burlingame's ball diamonds are part of the city's excellent recreation facilities.



Allen Community College- Burlingame Campus. "Big city education in a small town."



Thanks to a donation from the Gates Foundation, the Burlingame Public Library is equipped with new computers for patrons.



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