A fire destroyed Nunu's Nightlite & Café on La. 93 in Arnaudville on Saturday morning. No one was injured. Several other business related to the location were heavily damaged.

**BY JASON BROWN**
Acadiana bureau

Officials have yet to determine the official cause of a fire that destroyed the Town Market Rural Arts Centre in Arnaudville on Sunday morning.

The business, commonly called Town Market or Nunu's, housed Deux Bayous Gallery, Frederick l'Ecole des Arts, Frederick Stage, George Marks Studio and Nunu's Nightlite & Café.

Artist George Marks opened the business, at La. 31 and La. 93, in 2005 in the hopes of creating a sustainable arts community in the small St. Martin Parish town of 1,450, according to the center's website.

Arnaudville Fire Chief Jake Marks, no relation to the artist, said firefighters responded with 18 fire trucks from seven area fire departments.

He said the structure was engulfed in flames when firefighters arrived shortly after 9 a.m.

"They did the best they could," Fire Chief Jake Marks said.

He said firefighters battled the blaze for four hours before they were able to get the fire under control.

The building was a total loss, he said.

Investigators had not found a use or point of origin Monday, he said.

Attempts to reach George Marks by phone and e-mail were unsuccessful Monday.

George Marks was described as "a visionary person" by Jill Hackney, president of the board of Frederick l'Ecole des Arts, a nonprofit arts organization, and a longtime friend.

She said he had just purchased the property a few months ago after having spent years under a lease/purchase agreement.

"Town Market was a building, but George has built a community," Hackney said. "We've all just lost our house, but we haven't lost each other."

Hackney said the fire was a tough break for George, but she believes Town Market will...
come back.

“I am hopeful and almost certain that we’re going to see some fundraising events to help rebuild,” she said.

An artist and resident of Arnaudville, William Lewis, said Town Market was one of the reasons he moved to Arnaudville five years ago.

He said several of his sculptures were destroyed in the fire.

“It’s almost unbelievable still,” Lewis said.

The owner of Tom’s Fiddle & Bow, Tom Pierce, called Town Market the focal point of the arts community in Arnaudville.

“It’s kind of sad,” Pierce said. “I started crying when I drove by. They lost everything.”

Pierce said the building was insured, which means there’s a good chance George Marks will be able to rebuild.

If he does, “It’s probably going to be even better,” Pierce said.