Fire guts area arts market

Cultural hub owner looking for a temporary location in Arnaudville

Judy Bastien
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ARNAUDVILLE — A major fire that broke out early Sunday morning destroyed the Town Market in downtown Arnaudville.

The building on La. 93 that housed NuNu's Nightlite & Café, Frederick l'Ecole des Arts, Frederick Stage, George Marks Studio and Deux Bayous Gallery had become a hub of art, culture and music in the town of about 1,450 people.

But now it appears to be a total loss, said Assistant Fire Chief Randy Courville of the Arnaudville Fire Department. No injuries were reported in the fire, and the cause was not immediately known.

"When we got here, there was heavy smoke throughout and it was pretty much a battle from that point on — not only having to fight the fire, but having to fight the fatigue from the heat," Courville said.

The Town Market was established about six years ago by Firefighters extinguish a blaze that consumed the Town Market Rural Arts Center Sunday morning in Arnaudville.

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artist George Marks, who came home to Arnaudville after his father became ill. He named it NuNu's, for his father's nickname.

During those six years, The Town Market and NuNu's Nightlite drew artists and musicians, chefs and people interested in the arts to the town of Arnaudville.

“We poured ourselves into that place,” Marks said.

Although the facility and most its contents are gone, Marks is not ready to give up. He already has a backup plan in play, at least for the short term.

“I'm going to try to find an alternate location in town, just to keep the events going and at least keep it in the public eye,” he said.

But that's just temporary. As to long term plans, Marks seems less certain.

“Bigger and better, I guess,” he said, his voice showing emotion. “I don't know.”

The fire gutted the building, leaving the walls standing, but the roof was in danger of caving in, Courville said.

The Arnaudville Fire Department was on the scene Sunday with assistance from the fire departments of Leonville, Cankton, Breaux Bridge, Henderson and Cecilia as well as the Prairie Fire District.

The fire was discovered by Roxanne Marks, who runs the cafe at NuNu's and is the sister of the building's owner, George Marks.

She had gone in at about 8:30 a.m. to make sure the building was ready to open for a Sunday afternoon event.

“When I walked in, I smelled what I thought was cigarette smoke,” Roxanne Marks said, adding that it was odd, because the building was a no-smoking facility.

“I walked to the back, turned on one light and walked outside of the back step. We (my mother and I) were on the phone,” she said. After the fire, her mother, Rita Marks, sat with her daughter on ice chests under a shade tree across from the destroyed building.

“All of a sudden, I saw the one light I had turned on go out and I saw the back door wasn't locked. That kind of scared me.”

The people who had worked in the building Saturday had told her the door was locked, but later that night, Rita Marks found it unlocked.

“Mama came at 10:30 and locked it again, because it was not locked, and this morning, it was unlocked again.”

It's unclear who may have unlocked the door, Roxanne Marks said, because only family members have keys, but she believes someone may have been in the building at some point.

After the light went out, Marks entered the building to investigate and discovered the fire.

She called 911, then attempted to save some of the items in the fire, but when police arrived, they advised her not to go back in.

“I was thinking of all the art,” she said. “I was thinking, at least, get something out.”

But about 15 minutes after she discovered the fire, the building was almost completely engulfed, she said.