

**This incident was included because of the many techniques that were changed because of what was learned from the tragedy.**

## **Brief History Of**

**May 28, 1977— Beverly Hills Supper Club,  
Southgate, KY, —Tragedy**



**May 28, 1977**

## **Brief History**

Courtesy <http://allensedge.com/BHdoc.pdf>

**Excerpted from *Beverly Hills Country Club*, by Earl W. Clark and Allen J. Singer. ISBN: 0738566195  
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### **Beverly Hills Country Club Introduction**

Ten minutes south of Cincinnati, the most luxurious showplace in the Midwest sat atop a grassy hill off U.S. Route 27 in Southgate, Kentucky. Every night of the week in the 1950s, sellout crowds flocked to Beverly Hills Country Club to watch the world's greatest entertainers perform. No secret to café society, this nightclub attracted local clientele and high rollers flying in from New York and Chicago.

From the 1930s to the early 1960s, Northern Kentucky was replete with nightclubs and gambling. Local businessman Pete Schmidt opened the Beverly Hills Club in Southgate in 1935 with a casino and live entertainment. An organized gaming group, the Cleveland Syndicate, wanted it. When Schmidt refused to sell, the club burned down. Arson was suspected but never proven. After he rebuilt it, Beverly Hills Country Club reopened in 1937, and Schmidt finally sold out.

The Cleveland Four (Moe Dalitz, Morris Kleinman, Louis Rothkopf, and Sam Tucker) ran Beverly Hills like the Desert Inn they operated in Las Vegas. They put in a rotating chorus line, and their connections brought in headliners from the major entertainment circuits. With affordable dinners, the draw of big stars, and the lure of the casino, customers came pouring in. After 20 successful years, crackdowns and grand jury indictments closed all gambling in 1961.

Beverly Hills stayed open without gambling, and business consequently plummeted. New budget cutbacks cancelled all shows and shrank the orchestra by half. The employees lost their jobs. The show people moved on.

On New Year's Eve 1961, Beverly Hills closed. Eight years later, local businessman Dick Schilling bought it and renovated it. Before it could open, it was completely gutted by fire. Schilling rebuilt it and opened it in 1971, without a casino.

The new Beverly Hills Supper Club was grand and plush. As before, there was dinner and a show, but the club also catered to proms, weddings, birthday parties, graduations, and conventions. Then, on May 28, 1977, Beverly Hills came to a tragic end when the club caught fire. A capacity crowd had come to see headliner John Davidson. One hundred, sixty-five patrons, musicians, and employees lost their lives in one of the nation's worst nightclub disasters. The site stands vacant now except for a historical marker commemorating the deadly event.

Modern generations equate Beverly Hills with tragedy, and understandably so. However, its legacy should be that of happiness. Decades before the fire, it was an unforgettable place to visit, and equal to the best clubs in Las Vegas, Miami, New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles.

Two entertainment-packed shows went on every night at Beverly Hills, three on Saturdays, seven days a week. A four-course dinner costing \$2.95 was served with high style in the Trianon Room before and after the show. At 8:00 p.m., the lights dimmed and the curtains swept open.

The audience applauded as a dazzling production number filled the stage, opening the show with a line of dancers high-kicking to music provided by the Gardner Benedict Orchestra. Afterwards, the first act, possibly a juggler or tap dancer, took the stage. The second act could be a comedian or a singer. A ballet number followed. The featured headliner then came on for 45 minutes. A "flag waver" finale closed the show.

After giving a standing ovation, audience members then played bingo or followed the headliner into the casino. While the orchestra took a break, some of the audience danced on stage to the music of the Jimmy Wilbur Trio. The second show started at 11:30 p.m., and if it was Saturday, the third show began at 1:00 a.m. Two weeks later, a different headliner would appear, along with an entirely new show.

**May 28, 1977**

## **Brief History**

Courtesy <http://allensedge.com/BHdoc.pdf>

Thanks to gambling, Beverly Hills could afford to bring in high-class entertainment like movie stars, opera singers, Broadway actors, and the day's top recording artists. Also crossing the stage were lesser known acts: comedians, jugglers, vocal quartets, dance teams, animal acts, balancing acts, and even roller skaters. Some big names were not booked. Though Frank Sinatra did not perform at Beverly Hills, he did visit. After he caught a show, Sinatra reportedly spent \$30,000 at the gaming tables.

Beverly Hills catered to the over-30 crowd; the musical acts were chosen based on what they preferred. Young adult record store patrons bought sophisticated music—full of romance and lush orchestrations recorded by the day's top crooners. These were the sorts of performers who tended to headline at Beverly Hills. This music held little appeal to the early-1950s teenage bobby-soxers, who coincidentally were too young to gamble in Beverly's casino. But rock-and-roll numbers were hitting the charts in 1955. By 1958, most record buyers were teenagers. The popular music scene was changing.

Despite this, Beverly Hills never featured any rock and roll. Cleveland booking agents Frank and Rocky Sennes handled the talent and did not consider the tastes of a potential young crowd.

Those who patronized Beverly Hills found it an unforgettable place to visit. The employees enjoyed it immensely. One waiter reminisced, "It was a fabulous place to work."

In 1951, saxophonist and author Earl W. Clark joined the Gardner Benedict Orchestra. Starstruck by all the talent, he began taking his Argus C3 35-millimeter camera to work. For the next decade he photographed everyone from the top stars down to the novelty acts. His subjects frequently posed in the backstage dressing rooms. Other times, surprise candid shots were taken while the entertainers chatted or relaxed, often while holding a cigarette.

Clark took the pictures during intermissions, sometimes moments before the start of the show. Many were taken beside one of the three couches backstage underneath the walls of photographs, like the headshots that graced the walls in Hollywood's Ciro's. Clark even snapped a few from the orchestra during a performance when not busy reading the score.

Thirteen years worth of wonder were captured during those fabulous nights. The images were made into slides so Clark could project them onto a screen. Over the coming decades, some slides deteriorated, resulting in a reddish hue. Frequent handling caused scratches and spotting in some. Flaws or no flaws, the images are imbued with a distinct 1950s flavor and reveal a unique view of life behind the stage at one of the nation's leading showplaces.

Clark played with many fine orchestra musicians at Beverly Hills over the years and has never forgotten them. Within these pages are: Frank Bowsher, sax; Carl Grasham, drums; Wally Hahn, trumpet/violin; Andy Jacob, violin; Jim Langenbrunner, tenor sax; Harold Marco, drums; Charlie Medert, trumpet; Bill Mavity, trumpet; Al Miller, tenor sax; Fritz Mueller, trumpet; Bill Rank, trombone; Bud Ruskin, bass; Glenn "Hap" Seaman, tenor/baritone sax; Wilbur "Shooky" Shook, drums; George Thomas, sax; Ted Tillman, drums; Marty Weitzel, sax; Dick Westrich, trumpet; Bob Wheeler, alto sax; Pierson DeJager, trumpet; and the Jimmy Wilbur Trio, including Dick Garrett, Bill Kleine, and Frank Gorman.

Thanks to the Internet, modern readers can experience the entertainers presented in these pages. Most acts in this book can be seen or heard on YouTube. Readers are urged to visit the Web site and experience entertainment that was, for many years, a mainstay of the nightclub scene and has been largely overlooked by recent generations.

The era has ended, but it has left behind a great legacy. In Clark's own words, he reflects, "It was a wonderful time and a long run for us, here in Northern Kentucky. A time which will never return. Gambling is now legal in some places, but not bearing the glamour of the Beverly surroundings. The clientele has changed from the once well-dressed and well-groomed. The songs have ended, too, but the memories linger on." And so they shall.

# Location

Courtesy Google:



Before

Courtesy <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~kycampbe/postcardbeverlyclub.htm>



Courtesy <http://www.hs.facebook.com/group.php?gid=166509976750#!/photo.php?fbid=100772926607846&set=o.166509976750>

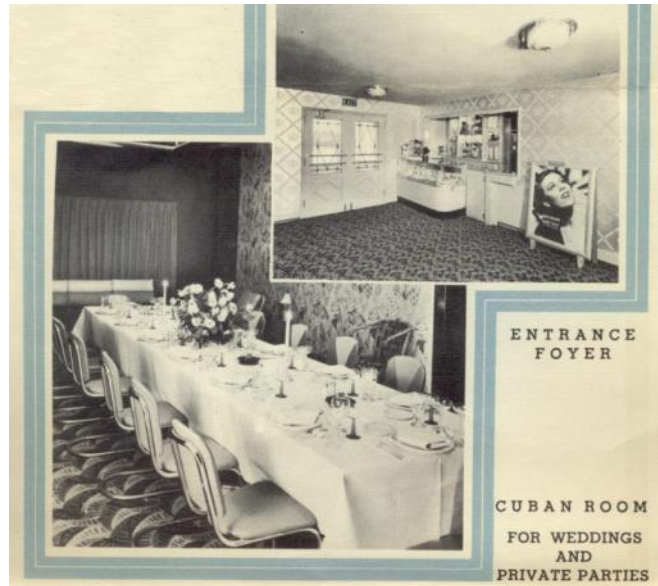
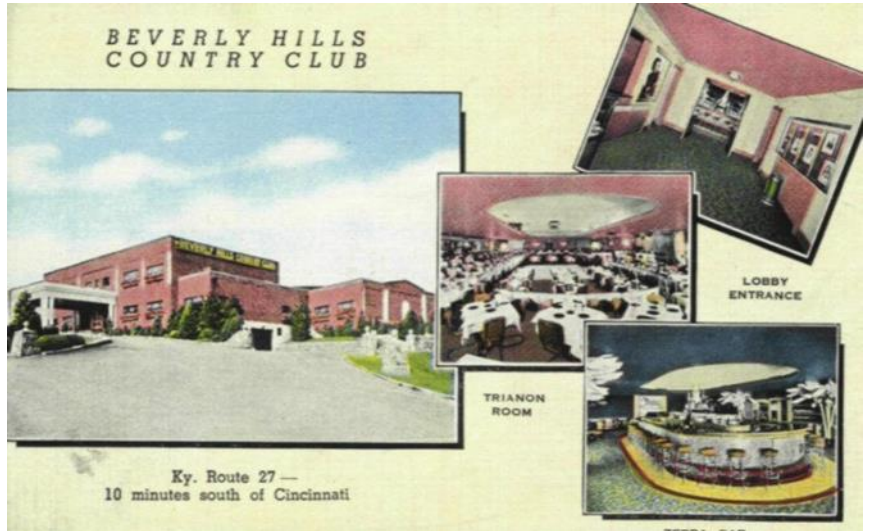


1949



Before

Courtesy [http://www.nkyviews.com/campbell/beverly\\_hills\\_menu.htm](http://www.nkyviews.com/campbell/beverly_hills_menu.htm)



**During**

Courtesy <http://www.hs.facebook.com/group.php?gid=166509976750&v=photos#!/photo.php?fbid=102357413116064&set=o.166509976750>



Courtesy <http://www.iklimnet.com/hotelfires/case15.html>  
[southgate\\_beverly2.htm](http://www.iklimnet.com/hotelfires/case15.html)

<http://www.nkyviews.com/campbell/>



Taken about 9:15 o the night of the fire, the light area is lights, not the fire. Firefighters are already on the scene.



This is about 10:30, and the fire has spread throughout the building. One hour later, the building was on the verge of collapse, and the firemen were ordered out of the building.



Taken about 9:35. Fire has burned thru the roof, ventilating the fire, and producing less smoke.

After

Courtesy [http://www.iklimnet.com/hotelfires/case15\\_2.html](http://www.iklimnet.com/hotelfires/case15_2.html)



[http://www.nkyviews.com/campbell/southgate\\_beverly2.htm](http://www.nkyviews.com/campbell/southgate_beverly2.htm)





# Tragedy's timeline: 165 die in May 28, 1977, fire

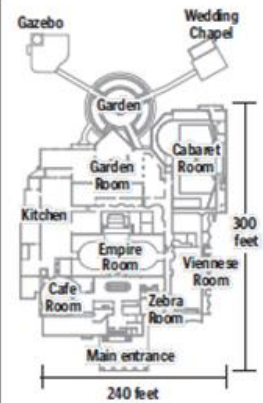
**8 p.m.**  
The Beverly Hills Supper Club fills with about 2,800 people on a warm Memorial Day weekend, including 1,300 packed into the Cabaret Room to see entertainer John Davidson. A wedding party in the Zebra Room, where some complained about the heat, breaks up for the night.

**8:50 p.m.**  
Fire is discovered by a staff member in the Zebra Room, where it had been smoldering in the ceiling. Attempts are made to fight the fire with extinguishers while others alert patrons.

**9:01 p.m.**  
Dispatchers receive the first call about the fire, which spreads up spiral stairs and down a hallway toward the Cabaret Room. Several minutes later, busboy Walter Bailey interrupts a comedy show to tell patrons to leave. Toxic smoke and fire soon push most toward a single, poorly marked exit that becomes clogged.

**10:30 p.m.**  
Firefighters carry out bodies, as the death toll surpasses 100. After roughly another hour, firefighters are evacuated for fear the roof would collapse. The fire continues to consume the building. Dazed survivors in evening wear stumble down the hill.

**2 a.m.**  
The fire is declared under control, but the search for victims continues. Ultimately 162 people die in the fire and three die later in the hospital. A temporary morgue is set up at the Fort Thomas Armory.

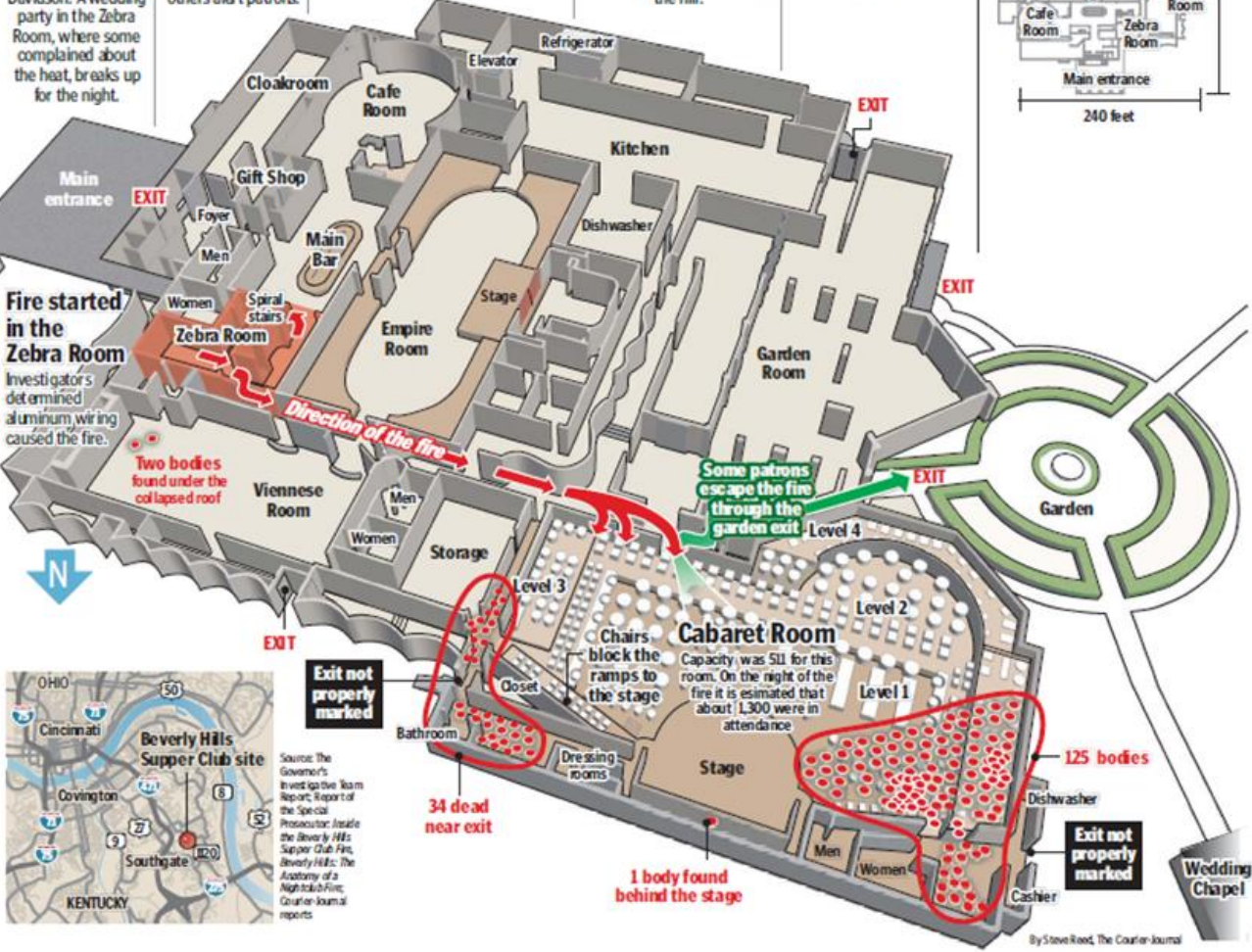


**Fire started in the Zebra Room**  
Investigators determined aluminum wiring caused the fire.

Two bodies found under the collapsed roof



Source: The Governor's Investigative Team Report; Report of the Special Prosecutor Inside the Beverly Hills Supper Club Fire, Beverly Hills: The Anatomy of a Nightclub Fire, Courier-Journal reports



By Steve Reed, The Courier-Journal

Courtesy [http://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://www.michaelbrugh.com/images/bhfire-big.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.michaelbrugh.com/bevhillslarge.html&usq=\\_\\_15Rh60kcTOuJQzlvKuyCzKI\\_gVc=&h=968&w=1593&sz=527&hl=en&start=0&zoom=1&tbnid=hT5oPdJ-PtYKkM:&tbnh=132&tbnw=217&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dbeverly%2Bhills%2Bsupper%2Bclub%26um%3D1%26hl%3Den%26sa%3DX%26rlz%3D1T4GLL\\_enUS390US390%26biw%3D1916%26bih%3D821%26tbs%3Disch:1&um=1&itbs=1&iact=rc&dur=718&ei=HKL6TL3214n4swPZ9aH3DQ&oei=HKL6TL3214n4swPZ9aH3DQ&esq=1&page=1&ndsp=32&ved=1t:429,r:2,s:0&tx=84&ty=66](http://www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://www.michaelbrugh.com/images/bhfire-big.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.michaelbrugh.com/bevhillslarge.html&usq=__15Rh60kcTOuJQzlvKuyCzKI_gVc=&h=968&w=1593&sz=527&hl=en&start=0&zoom=1&tbnid=hT5oPdJ-PtYKkM:&tbnh=132&tbnw=217&prev=/images%3Fq%3Dbeverly%2Bhills%2Bsupper%2Bclub%26um%3D1%26hl%3Den%26sa%3DX%26rlz%3D1T4GLL_enUS390US390%26biw%3D1916%26bih%3D821%26tbs%3Disch:1&um=1&itbs=1&iact=rc&dur=718&ei=HKL6TL3214n4swPZ9aH3DQ&oei=HKL6TL3214n4swPZ9aH3DQ&esq=1&page=1&ndsp=32&ved=1t:429,r:2,s:0&tx=84&ty=66)

# The fire's destructive toll

*"I felt a great sense of danger coming over me. Like, you know, we were really in trouble."*

Janetta Johnson  
Beverly Hills Supper Club waitress

Reports from three teams of investigators, including one named by then-Governor Julian Carroll indicated that many factors contributed to the May 28, 1977 fire. Among these were inadequate wiring, no sprinkler systems, combustible wall and carpet materials and the absence of an alarm system. Below is a detailed look at the causes and effect of the fire.

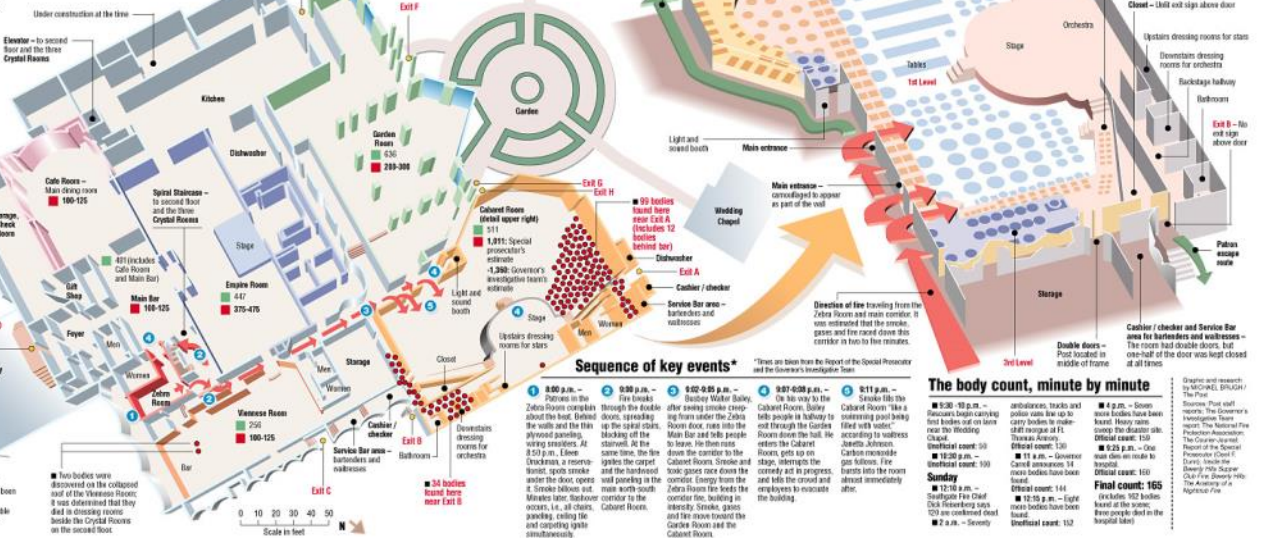


**KEY TO FIRST LEVEL**  
 Recommended room occupancy  
 Actual room occupancy  
 Exits  
 Elevation

**First level**

**LIFE SAFETY CODE**

- These code violations were noted, among others:
- 1. **Carpeting and padding** in the main north-south corridor contributed combustible gases to the fire.
- 2. **The club** was not equipped with a fire sprinkler system.
- 3. **The Cabaret Room** should have had a fourth exit, and all exits should have been visible.
- 4. **The Cabaret Room** had more than double the recommended number of people in the sight of the fire.



**Size of the Club**

**Cabaret Room**

**Sequence of key events\***

- 8:00 p.m.** - Patrons in the Zebra Room overhear the fire. Dinkman the waiter ignites the carpet and the hardwood under the doors, sparks smoke and flames follow out. Minutes later, smokeover in the room, i.e., all chairs, padding, ceiling tile and carpeting ignite simultaneously.
- 8:30 p.m.** - Fire breaks through the double doors, spreading up the spiral stairs, blocking off the stairwell. At the same time, the fire ignites the carpet and the hardwood under the doors, sparks smoke and flames follow out. Minutes later, smokeover in the room, i.e., all chairs, padding, ceiling tile and carpeting ignite simultaneously.
- 8:42-8:55 p.m.** - Stanley Walker Baskin, after seeing smoke creeping from under the Zebra Room door, runs into the Main Bar and tells people to leave. He then runs down the corridor to the Cabaret Room. Smoke and toxic gases race down the corridor. Energy from the Zebra Room fire feeds the corridor fire, building in intensity. Smoke, gases and fire race toward the Garden Room and the Cabaret Room.
- 8:57-9:08 p.m.** - On his way to the Cabaret Room, Baskin tells people in hallway to exit through the Garden Room down the hall. He returns the Cabaret Room, gets up on stage, interrupts the comedy act in progress, and tells the crowd and employees to evacuate the building.
- 9:11 p.m.** - Smoke fills the Cabaret Room. "As a covering goal being filled with water," according to waitress Janetta Johnson, Cabaret microphone gas follows. Fire bursts into the room almost immediately after.

**The body count, minute by minute**

- 8:30-9:30 p.m.** - Rescue Design carrying first bodies out on litters near the Wedding Chapel. **Official count: 50**
- 10:30 p.m.** - Cabaret announced. 14 more bodies have been located. **Official count: 100**
- 11:15 p.m.** - Southgate Fire Chief Dick Henning says 103 are confirmed dead. **Official count: 132**
- 4 p.m.** - Seven more bodies have been found. Heavy rain keeps the disaster site. **Official count: 150**
- 6:25 p.m.** - One body does not make it hospital. **Official count: 149**
- 11:15 p.m.** - Eight more bodies have been found at the scene. **Final count: 165** (Of which, 162 bodies listed at the scene; three people died in the hospital.)

\*Based on information from the Report of the Special Prosecutor and the Governor's Investigation Team.

# 160 bodies recovered in Newport fire; state's 'worst tragedy,' Carroll says

By RICHARD WHITT  
and RICHARD WILSON  
Courier-Journal Staff Writers

SOUTHGATE, Ky. — Firemen continued to search for bodies in the burnt out rubble of the Beverly Hills Supper Club yesterday after what Gov. Julian Carroll called "the worst tragedy in Kentucky's history."

Meanwhile, officials began looking into the cause of Saturday night's blaze and considering ways to prevent future tragedies.

By 5:30 p.m. yesterday, 160 bodies had been removed from the smoldering ruins of the large, plush nightclub just south of Newport in Northern Kentucky.

Dr. Fred G. Stine, the Campbell County coroner, estimated yesterday after-

noon that from 50 to 250 bodies remained buried under the debris.

He said reports reaching him at a temporary morgue set up in the Ft. Thomas Armory indicated "many more" victims. "The bodies are stacked several deep," he said.

—However, other officials quoted by The New York Times and The Associated Press later in the day said they believed most of the bodies had been recovered.

No matter how many bodies remained, Stine said, "There's no chance in the world that anyone is left alive in the building."

In addition to those killed in the blaze, Stine said 130 people were injured, some seriously. They were taken

to several hospitals in the Northern Kentucky and Cincinnati area.

Search efforts were delayed at first by the intense heat from the fire Saturday night and were later hampered by rubble from the building's collapsed roof.

The search resumed yesterday morning but was halted for the day at about 6 p.m. when workers began suffering from exhaustion. It will resume again this morning.

Officials said yesterday they had not determined the cause of the blaze.

"All we can do is speculate how the fire started," said Carroll, who spent Saturday night and most of yesterday at the scene of the tragedy on a hilltop overlooking U.S. 27.

Carroll told a news conference at the disaster site that he believed the fire had started in the basement of the nightclub, spread there without anyone realizing it and then suddenly broke through the floor of one of the dining areas.

"There is strong suggestion the fire was fairly much out of control when it was discovered," Carroll said. "One of the girls (waitresses) had a fire extinguisher and she couldn't put it out. There was, we understand, an oil explosion in the basement and also an explosion in the kitchen."

(The Associated Press said Stine had been told by the manager of the club that the fire started in a faulty generator.)

State Fire Marshal Warren Southworth was asked to comment on the cause of the fire and other related matters but was not permitted to talk by Carroll.

The governor said he considered it inappropriate for Southworth to talk to reporters while the fire is being investigated.

Richard Riesenberg, chief of the Southgate Volunteer Fire Department, said he had no information on where or how the fire started. He said his department responded to the first call about 9:15 p.m. At that time, he said, fire was already shooting through the roof and

**See 160 BODIES**  
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# 160 bodies are recovered in Kentucky's 'worst tragedy'

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"people were gushing out of the building by the hundreds."

He said he took men off the hoses, instructed them to put on breathing packs and sent them into the building to help people out.

Several eyewitnesses at the supper club said the fire swept quickly through the structure.

Parking lot attendant Greg Alford of Cold Spring said he was parking customers' cars when the fire started.

"I had just taken a car up to the parking lot and came back to get another one. Smoke came pouring out of the front of the building. I tried to go in and help, but I couldn't stand it. The smoke was so bad," he said.

Within minutes the entire structure was ablaze, he said.

"It happened so fast," said another witness. "In just a few minutes, the entire building was on fire."

Gov. Carroll, and others, confirmed that the supper club contained no sprinkler system. But the governor discounted the possibility that such a system would have reduced the number of deaths.

The fire, fueled by false walls, or partitions, and furniture, spread through the air conditioning ducts, Carroll said he had been told.

He said sprinklers would have hung from the ceiling, but the ducts were installed above the ceiling, eliminating the effectiveness of a sprinkling system.

Lt. Larry Herfurth, of the Southgate Fire Department, said a state law was passed too late to bring the building under a new fire code that requires sprinkling systems.

"The building was rebuilt after the last fire (July 1970) but before the new law," Herfurth added.

In light of the Beverly Hills tragedy, Carroll said he would give serious consideration to new legislation requiring sprinkling systems in all large buildings already constructed and catering to large numbers of people.

He said the current law requires only that new buildings or ones recently renovated have such systems.

Riesenberg, said yesterday that Beverly Hills had adequate exits for a building its size. Another Southgate fire official said the building had been inspected only last month, although records on the

investigation's results were not available yesterday.

Officials estimated yesterday that there were 3,000 to 3,500 patrons in the club when the fire broke out.

About 1,200 people in the supper club's Cabaret Room were first alerted to the fire when Walter Bailey, an 18-year-old bus boy, interrupted a performance by comedians Teter & McDonald, who preceded singer John Davidson, the main attraction.

Many patrons, however, reportedly thought the interruption was part of the comedians' routine and consequently did not begin to leave the room as the bus boy suggested.

Customers in the club's several private dining rooms, the bar, and elsewhere, were warned to vacate the building through a message on the intercom system.

Most of the bodies removed yesterday were found in the Cabaret Room, located on the building's northwest corner.

Among the dead was Doug Herro, Davidson's music director. Davidson, who escaped uninjured, reportedly left yesterday morning for Los Angeles. (Story, Page A 6.)

Firemen had to wait until yesterday morning to resume their efforts because of the intense heat generated by the fire. A large crane was brought to the scene at mid-morning to begin lifting steel beams and the fallen roof from the victims still inside.

By 11:30 a.m. firemen began removing bodies in black "body bags" from the rubble.

"I have no idea how many bodies are left in there," said Riesenberg, the Southgate fire chief. "There's just body after body after body," he added.

"There are just bodies scattered all over," said John Fangman, a volunteer rescue worker from Ft. Thomas.

Many bodies were found along existing or burned-out walls in groups of a dozen or more, Dr. Stine said.

David Jones, administrator of the state medical examiner's program, said that is typical in fires involving many fatalities.

"What they do is they all head for an exit — like a stampede," he said.

"In some instances people are trampled. Also some individual may head for what he thinks is an exit and people follow him. When they see there's no

exit, they just pile on top of one another. And that's the way you find them," Jones said.

Stine said identification of male victims brought to the makeshift morgue Saturday night and early yesterday was relatively easy. The victims died from smoke inhalation, were not badly burned and carried identification in their wallets. Many of the women, however, carried purses that were either left behind or destroyed by the fire.

About 70 of the 160 known dead had been identified by mid-afternoon. More were identified later.

But Stine said identifying other victims will be much more difficult and slower because they are badly burned.

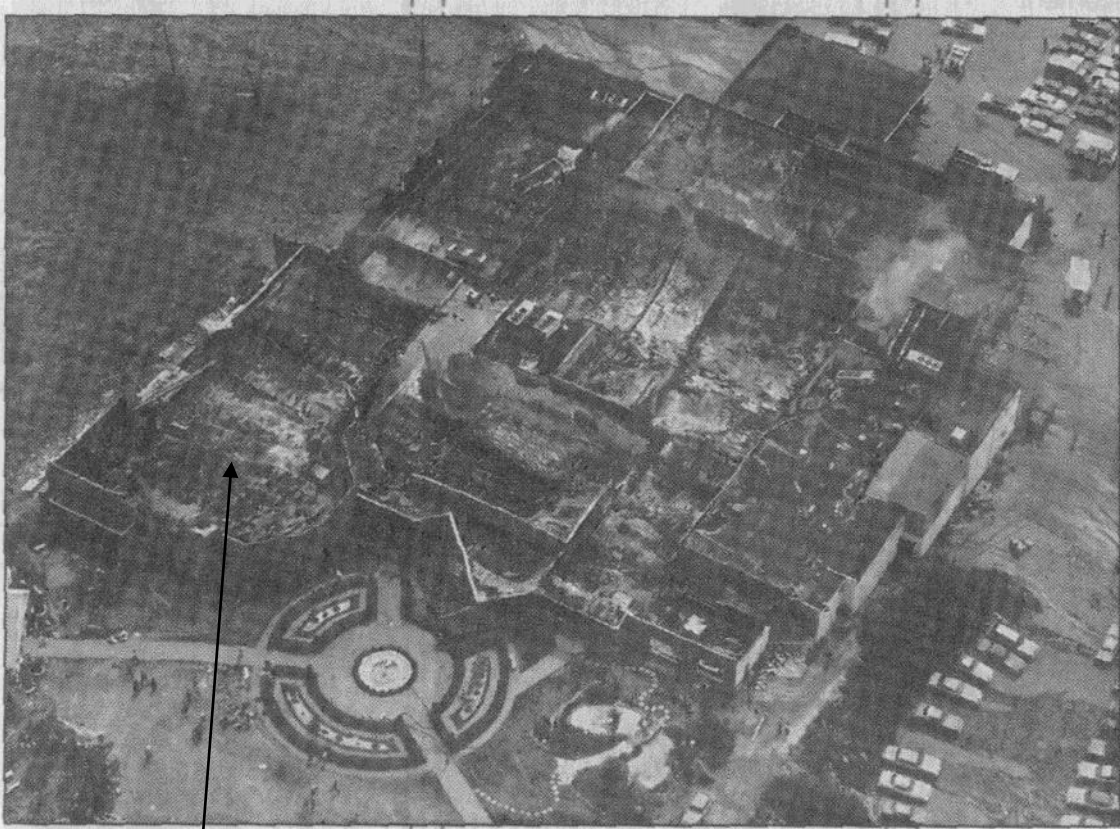
They will have to be identified by using dental charts, he added.

A special FBI identification unit flew to the scene early yesterday from Washington D.C. to assist local officials in identifying the victims.

The building's loss could not be determined yesterday. But Asst. State Fire Marshal Tom Wald estimated the damage at "at least \$2 million."

The building's owners, Richard and Jack Schilling, could not be reached for comment yesterday.

The roof collapsed on the Beverly Hills Supper Club in Saturday night's fire, trapping many inside. Most victims were in the Cabaret Room, bottom left.



Cabaret Room



The Rev. Thomas Payne, a Cincinnati police chaplain, comforted a relative of one of the vic-

Staff Photo by Keith Williams  
tims of Saturday night's Beverly Hills Club fire in Southgate.

# Fears and tears follow trail of fire's victims

By **BEN JOHNSON**  
Courier-Journal Staff Writer

**SOUTHGATE, Ky.** — Tears welled up in the eyes of Harold Penwell Sr. of Xenia, Ohio, as he sat in the lobby of St. Luke's Hospital in Fort Thomas, Ky. He pulled out an already damp white handkerchief and pushed up his eye glasses and wiped his face.

"I have a very good friend, you know," he said, his hands now crossed in his lap. He looked up at a stranger and added, "My God is my friend; He was with me all the way. I made it through. We had a lot of hope until we found out. If I didn't have God, I wouldn't have made it."

The tears came faster now.

Penwell had just identified the body of his son, Harold Penwell Jr., at the makeshift morgue at the Fort Thomas Armory. He walked through the neat rows of bodies covered with thin sheets of white plastic. Penwell slowly nodded his head as the attendant asked him if the body was that of his son.

That scene was repeated over and over again yesterday by friends and relatives

of people killed in Saturday night's fire at the Beverly Hills Supper Club in Southgate.

Penwell's son had gone to the supper club with a group from Dayton, Ohio, where he was living. The younger Penwell's wife, Karen, was also at the club and suffered smoke inhalation. She was expected to be released from St. Luke's Hospital this morning.

"He was a brave boy," the father said. "He was wounded twice in Vietnam. Got two Silver Stars. One of those was for saving 14 people one night. This boy been through a lot. His wife told me that he pushed her ahead and out the door while he tried to help people in the club."

Then Penwell started nodding his head and walked outside the hospital to see if his daughter-in-law's parents had arrived.

"There's a message in this to a lot of people," he said. "Maybe this will waken up some people. If it wasn't for faith, I

See **SURVIVORS**

**PAGE 9, col. 1, this section**

## Survivors, relatives share tears and memories

Continued From Page One

wouldn't be here. People need more faith."

Ulysses Caldwell, 39, of Longview, Tex., didn't think he'd get out of the building alive.

"I felt so helpless," he said as he sat on his bed in the hospital. He was treated for smoke inhalation and a bruised leg.

Caldwell was at the club with the Greater Cincinnati Choral Union, which was having a banquet and fashion show on the second floor.

"At first, someone came and said it was just a cigarette burning in the hallway," he said. "Then somebody else came and said for everybody to get out and take their time. At first, they were walking out slowly. But when they saw the smoke, some of 'em was panicking and screaming. I tried to get up and help people get down that one flight of stairs. The exits were jammed with people trying to get out."

"It was terrible," he added. "Like something I've never seen before. It was like something you'd see on television."

Dianne Kron of Louisville and her husband, Tom, were in the Cabaret Room, watching two comedians and waiting for John Davidson's act to start, when the busboy ran up on stage and told everybody there was a fire in the building.

"For a minute, everybody thought it was part of the act, and then the two comedians told us it wasn't," Mrs. Kron said last night.

"We figured that in the 30 seconds it took us to get our things together, stand up and start walking, the room started filling with smoke. People started pushing and moving more swiftly. We figured 30 seconds more and we couldn't have gotten out. It was so swift that it was unbelievable."

She and her husband, who owns and operates a restaurant in Louisville, walked to the nearest exit. They ex-

pected to be outside when they got through the door. They weren't.

"It turned out to be a long, narrow corridor, and at that point it was like a bunch of cattle. We were being pushed along by the group."

It was dark, and the smoke was thick, and she saw people "putting clothes, anything" over their faces. "Some of them were screaming but not yet crazy with panic. I understand that right behind us the real panic began, when the flames crossed the roof" of the hallway.

There was a second exit down the corridor and to the right, Mrs. Kron said. Her husband had his hands around her waist, pushing her along, and they reached the door.

"We went down a rickety stairway and I tripped and a man pulled me down the steps. . . . By the time we got down the steps, touched the ground and looked up, the doorway we had just come through was in flames.

"We figured another 30 seconds. We got out with a minimum of panic. My husband was very calm. I was a little panicky. But 30 or 40 seconds in back of us . . . people just could not have made it out. I just don't understand how it could have spread so quickly. It was unbelievable."

Mrs. Kron said she and her husband had gone to the club about 6:30 p.m. for dinner and to see Davidson's act later. She said that there were about 12 people in their group and that all of them made it out all right.

At the three area hospitals, St. Luke's, St. Elizabeth's and Booth's, friends and relatives walked in slowly and solemnly, some alone and some in groups. They gave the receptionists at the front desks the name of the person they were looking for.

In many instances, the news was that the person had not been admitted to any of the hospitals.

Others checked the hospitals by telephone. When the names didn't show up on the hospitals' patient lists, the advice was usually the same — "Have you checked with the morgue?"

The scene at a makeshift morgue, about two miles from the supper club, was quiet and solemn. Television reporters were admonished from taking pictures of bodies. A string of black hearses waited outside the armory.

As the bodies were brought in by large Army trucks, they were unloaded by law enforcement officials, Red Cross workers and scores of volunteers. The bodies, in black "body bags," were carried on stretchers to the second-floor gymnasium for identification.

Some friends and relatives of victims waited outside. A few ventured inside to see if they could identify the bodies.

Two young girls stood outside near the side of the building. A worker walked over with a handful of jewelry and showed it to them.

"Oh, my God," one of the girls shouted. "My mom and my dad."

Several workers and a member of the clerical team assisting at the morgue walked with the women to the gym to make positive identification of the bodies.

As the bodies were identified by relatives and workers, they were put into one of four large refrigerator trucks provided by a grocery-store chain. When hearses from numerous funeral homes arrived to pick up the bodies, the trucks were opened and the bodies transferred.

Elmo Price, 16, was one of the many teen-age volunteers who helped load and unload the bodies. "When I first got here, it was just terrible," he said. "It still is bad and it sometimes starts to get to me. But this has to be done and I'm trying to help out."

Inside the building, efforts to identify bodies were proceeding. Workers

brought a body bag to a table near a window. Sheets had been set up around the area, much as a temporary war-time operating room.

A man in a green smock and wearing a surgical mask unzipped the bag and said, "This body is not identified. It's unidentifiable." Then another man zipped the bag up.

Minutes later, others workers covered the windows with white sheets to keep the curious from looking in.

The workers who loaded the bodies wore surgical masks and rubber surgical gloves.

When Brenda Wheeler visited her husband, John, at St. Luke's Hospital yesterday, she still had on the green dress she had worn to the supper club. Her matching green eye makeup was smudged. She wept a bit as she talked about the fire. Her husband suffered smoke inhalation.

The Middletown, Ohio, couple had gone to the club alone and were seated with a Cincinnati couple they had never met before. "We still don't know if they got out okay," Mrs. Wheeler said. Her husband helped others get out of the building after she was safely out of the building.

Another survivor of the tragedy was Ralph Ed Graves, commissioner of the state Department for Local Government and a former state legislator.

Graves said he had just been seated with his party of three others in the Cabaret Room about 9 p.m. when a busboy, pointing to marked exits, told the customers to leave the supper club. "It was smoke and pandemonium," he said as people scrambled for the exits.

He said he and his party originally had a larger table further from the exit. "Some gentleman said he had seven in his party and asked if we would trade with him. We did and that's what put us closer to the exit. I feel very lucky about that."

# Survivors, relatives share tears and memories

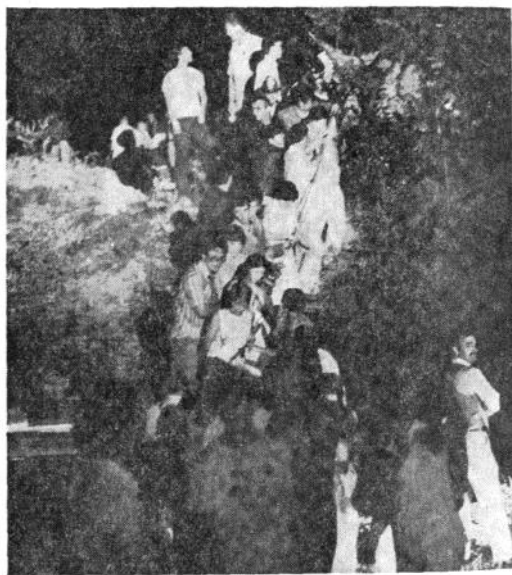


Photo by Melinda AUSE

Survivors of the Beverly Hills Supper Club fire couldn't get their cars out of the parking lot because of the jam of fire engines and emergency vehicles. Some of them were led by a rope rail down the hill on which the club sits to the main road.

## Fire sparks memories of Cocoanut Grove blaze

Associated Press

BOSTON — The tragic supper club fire in Southgate, Ky., stirs up painful memories here of a similar holocaust nearly 35 years ago — the Cocoanut Grove blaze that killed 491.

About 1,000 people were jammed into Boston's largest nightclub Nov. 28, 1942, when flames, thick smoke and carbon monoxide turned the place into a furnace. The nightclub, built to hold 750, had 11 exits but all except two were locked and bodies were found piled up by the doors in heaps.

Some survivors said they first saw the fire when a girl with blazing hair ran screaming through the club. Others told of sheets of flame racing across the ceiling shortly after a busboy lit a match to change an overhead lightbulb. When the Boston Fire Department closed its books on the case in 1970, the cause of the fire was still listed as "unknown."

Among those killed were cowboy movie star Buck Jones, all 22 members of an engagement party and many college

students rejoicing over a Holy Cross football victory.

Hundreds of firemen and other rescue workers rushed to the scene in the city's theater district, and medical personnel were called in from all parts of Massachusetts. Taxis, jeeps and mail trucks were used as makeshift ambulances.

Doctors at Massachusetts General Hospital tried out what was then a new burn-treatment technique on the hundreds of victims. Previously tannic acid was the usual treatment, but physicians decided that night not to try cleaning the wounds but just to smear on petroleum jelly, bandage the burns, and administer drugs, oxygen and plasma. Afterwards, the new technique became standard procedure.

The fire prompted many cities to stiffen their safety codes with provisions that became known as "Grove laws." Smoking was forbidden in many public places, seating limits were imposed, exit requirements were established and combustible decorations were outlawed.

# Singer Davidson was shaken, unhurt

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — A tired and shaken John Davidson flew to Los Angeles yesterday, only hours after five members of the band that was to accompany him and his music director died in Saturday night's fire at the Beverly Hills Supper Club.

The 35-year-old singer was headlining a show at the nightclub in Southgate, Ky., when the fire broke out in the basement.

Davidson said he was in his dressing room shaving for his performance when his drummer rushed in and told him the building was on fire.

"We didn't think it was that serious," Davidson told a reporter for radio station KNX. "It's like any tragedy — you think that it is not going to be that bad. So we very slowly filed out and then the filing got faster and faster."

"Just seconds after we got out, the door we came through was engulfed with smoke and flames," Davidson said.

Davidson said the part of the club in which he was to appear was crowded beyond capacity.

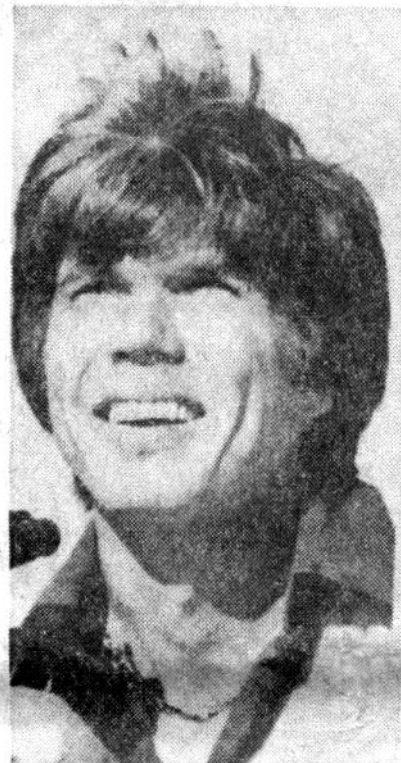
After he got out of the building, Davidson said, he helped hold doors open to let others escape.

"The people were jamming the doors, and there was such a panic. I estimate there was 1,100 people in the one room I was in, just jammed in. . . ."

"The fire spread so fast, there was no smoke when I first went down from my dressing room, and so I went out thinking I'll come back for my stuff because we didn't see any fire at all."

"Then the black smoke came very quickly in this big building full of banquet halls, and I just know there are more people in there."

One of those who died in the fire was



Associated Press

John Davidson  
Drummer warned him

Davidson's musical director, Douglas George Herro of Canoga Park, Calif. Herro had worked with Davidson for 4 1/2 years.

"He was the formation behind everything I do," Davidson said. "He was a very fine musician, a very talented man."

The musicians who died were members of the house band.

Comedians Jim McDonald and Jim Teter were onstage in the club's Cabaret Room when a busboy grabbed a microphone and announced that a fire had broken out.

McDonald said patrons streamed out the exits while the comedians repeated directions and cracked jokes attempting to keep people calm. But when flames reached a hallway outside the room, panic followed.

# The survivors

## It was a night of horror, gratitude for newly-wed couple

By MERVIN AUBESPIN  
Courier-Journal Staff Writer

For years to come, May 28, 1977, will be a day of absolute happiness and indescribable horror for Don and Dianne Albrecht.

The young couple were married in Louisville Saturday.

They also escaped nearly unharmed from what Gov. Julian Carroll has called the worst tragedy in Kentucky's history — a fire that destroyed the Beverly Hills nightclub in Southgate, Ky.

According to Mrs. Albrecht, 33, she and her husband had arrived at the popular nightclub, located near Covington, earlier than their reservations called for and had been allowed to dine early. Dur-

ing their dinner, a busboy dropped food on her dress and stopped by a number of times afterward to apologize.

After dinner, the couple made the early call to the Cabaret Room for a show by singer John Davidson and were able to get good seats near an exit.

"There had been another event in the room and it was mass confusion when we arrived," she said.

Shortly afterward, Mrs. Albrecht noticed the same busboy rush by with another man. Shortly thereafter, the busboy appeared on stage and announced that there was a fire in the building. He directed the patrons which exit to use.

"We immediately left through an exit that passed through the service bar and

out to the chapel area and, as I recall, there was no real panic when we got outside," said Albrecht, a 33-year-old Louisville certified public accountant.

He and his wife remembered that most of the people at first were calm, not knowing the extent of the fire or that many patrons and employes were trapped inside.

"I don't think any of us really knew what was going on until we heard the first explosion and saw the smoke coming out of the building," Mrs. Albrecht recalled.

She said that at that time some of the people standing with them fainted and they began to hear calls for medical attention.

"It seemed that the fire trucks would never arrive," said her husband, who concluded that at the time a minute felt like an hour.

The couple said the real impact of what was happening occurred when a young man, over the protest of his female companion, went back into the flaming building. "I have got to go back and help . . . I've pulled four bodies out and they are stacked up everywhere," they said the young man told his hysterical companion.

Shortly afterwards, the Albrechts climbed down a steep hill and went to the front of the building, where they saw firemen fighting the leaping flames.

Because of the firefighting equipment, most autos parked at the club couldn't be removed.

In a telephone interview from their Covington hotel room, the couple described reaction to their narrow escape as "terrified, shocked, haunting and grateful to be alive."

"The most striking thing, as I recall, was the crowd of people who stood with us on the hill at the rear of the club after we got out. It was strange . . . they were all dressed up. Some in ruffles . . . and the cries of people searching for loved ones as the building went up in flames," said Mrs. Albrecht.

"There was one guy walking around calling 'Janet.' He did it for hours. Another person kept yelling for 'Butch.' There were others calling for others . . . I can still hear it now," she said.

"I can't explain how nice everyone was to us and others," Mrs. Albrecht said. "Although the trucks and buses were taking people to a common drop-off place, when one lady learned that it was our wedding night, she insisted that her husband take us to our hotel."

"The first thing we did was call our parents and tell them we were all right. Then we called our friends who we knew were concerned," she said.

Yesterday morning the young couple went back to the club where, after a four-hour wait, they were able to get their car.

The couple said they would be returning to their new home, at 9831 Oakshire in Jeffersonton, sometime today.

"Although we didn't get to do the things we planned, we are grateful said Mrs. Albrecht, noting that her only injury was an ankle sprained when she climbed down the hill.

"Somehow I will always remember the sounds of the flames and the realization that that whole beautiful building was being destroyed before my eyes," her husband added.



Tired Southgate firemen rest after fighting the fire and removing bodies from the charred remains of the Beverly Hills Supper Club.

Staff Photo by Keith Williams



# A hero

## Busboy who announced fire saved many people

By **NORM CLARKE**  
Associated Press

SOUTHGATE, Ky. — "The worst thing of all is that most of the people didn't believe there was a fire. They're probably still in there," said 18-year-old Walter Bailey, who became a hero in the nightclub fire that killed more than 200 people Saturday night.

Bailey, a busboy at the Beverly Hills Supper Club, jumped onstage before 600 people and calmly pointed out fire exits. Then, after leading groups of panicking patrons outside, he returned to rescue stragglers.

"I had just finished carrying trays and I was watching the show," said Bailey, an Alexandria, Ky., native who graduated from high school last week.

"One of the waitresses told me there

was a fire in the Zebra Room. It is up near the front entrance of the building, next to the bar.

"I ran back to the showroom and asked the lady in charge if I could go to the microphone and tell everybody to get out. She didn't say anything, so I did it anyway," said Bailey, shirtless outside a rear entrance watching firemen cart away the dead.

"I walked up to the stage and took the mike away from the two comedians. They just stood there, surprised. I told 'em (the crowd) not to go out the front. I told them to walk slowly out the doors and I pointed to two exit signs.

"After we got out of the room, you could see the smoke coming up the halls. It really spread fast. In five minutes, it was all over the building. All the lights

went out in the Cabaret Room, or else the smoke was so dense it was dark in there," he said.

After fleeing the building, Bailey said he and some fellow workers decided to re-enter the smoke-filled halls.

"I heard people moaning and calling for help. We went back in and started carrying people out. Most of them were down on the floor. We grabbed people by the shirts and hands, anything we would grab.

"We saved a lot of lives, maybe 20 or 30."

Bailey, leaning against a chapel converted into an emergency hospital ward, looked across a lawn littered with victims.

"It's a real tragedy," he said.

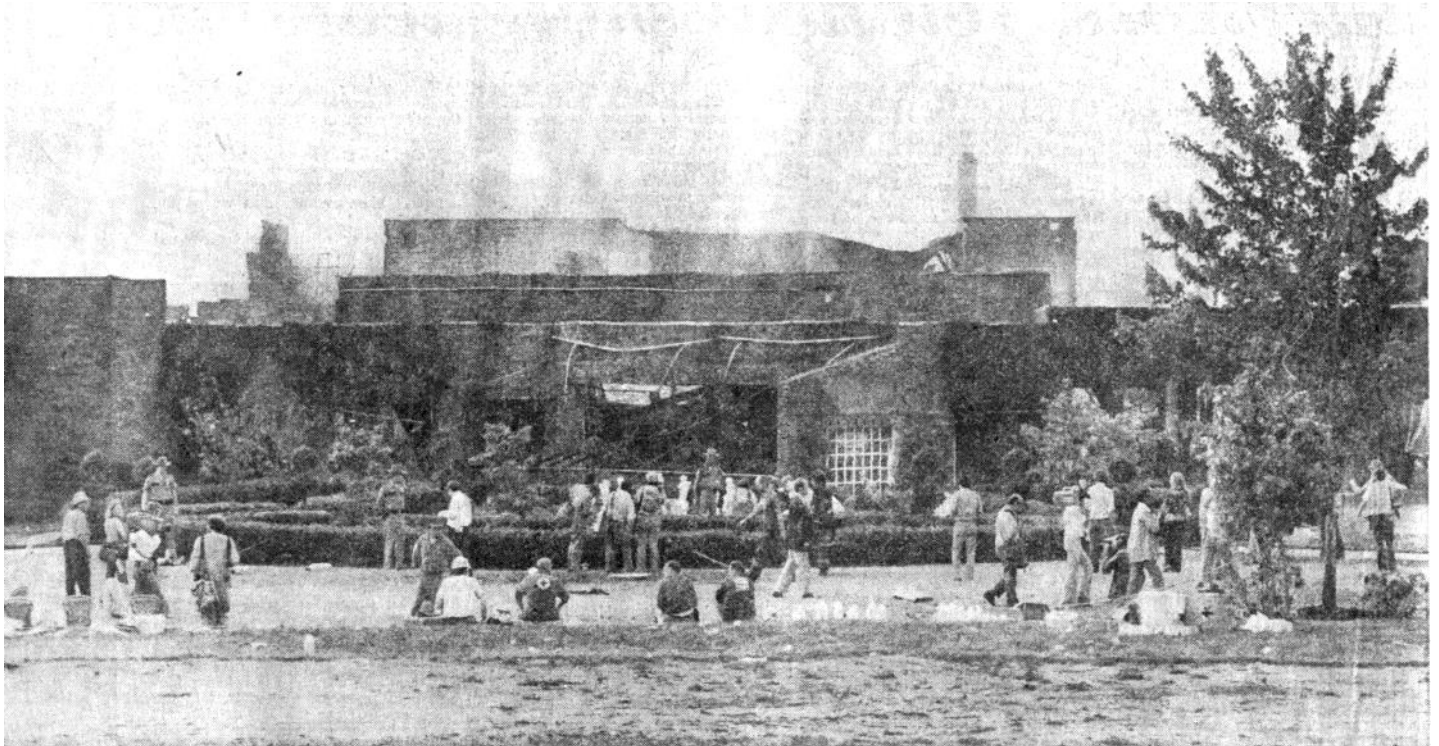


Associated Press

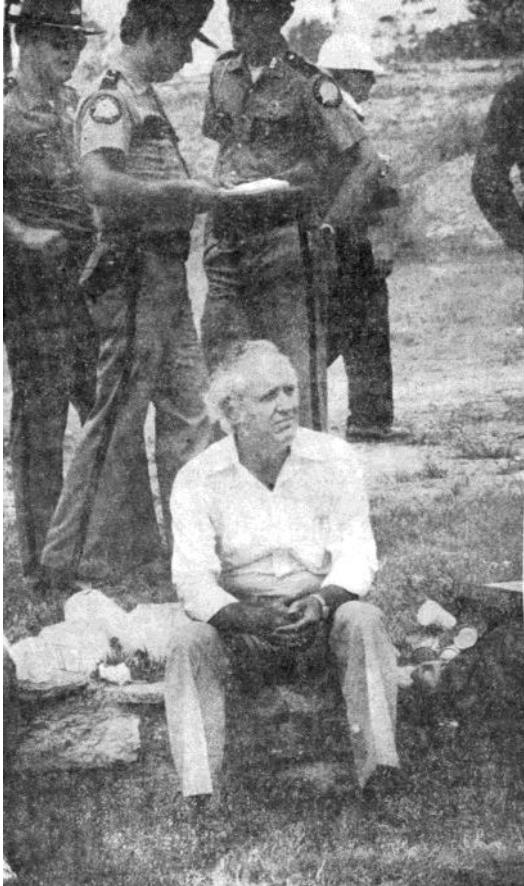
**Walter Bailey**  
*Announced the fire*

## *The scene: Aftermath of deadly fire*

Kentucky State Police stand watch over the remains of the Beverly Hills Supper Club while rescue workers rest in back of the club's burned out shell.



*The scene:  
Aftermath  
of deadly fire*



Little was left standing in the wake of the fire that destroyed the Beverly Hills Supper Club. At right, workers begin cleaning up the fire-fighting equipment. Above, firemen remove one of the victims.

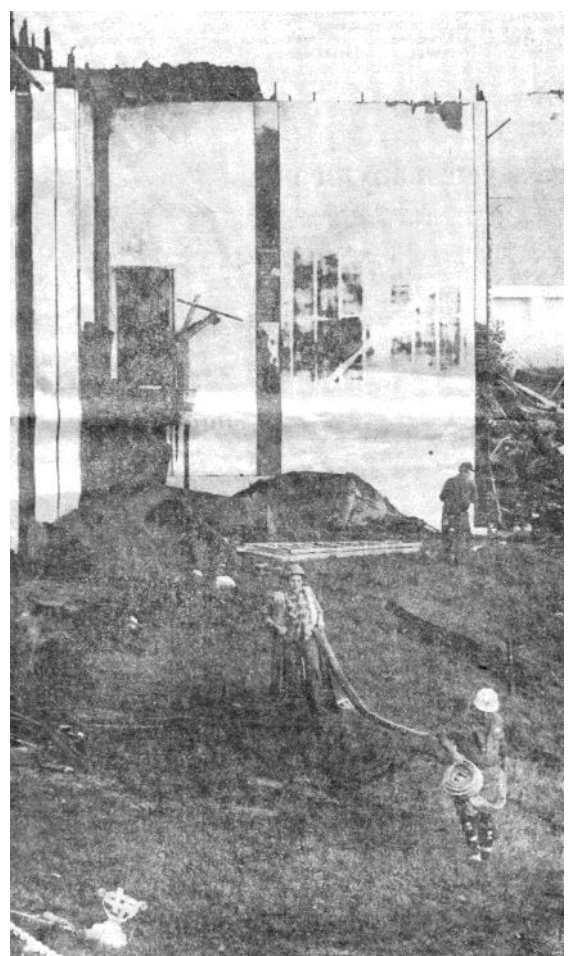
Photos—Keith Williams

Kentucky Gov. Julian Carroll could only sit and wait while firemen removed the bodies of victims of the nightclub blaze.



The Fort Thomas armory became a makeshift morgue yesterday as the task of identifying the victims began.

Associated Press



**column six**

# Beverly Hills was posh place you visited to have a ball

## Commentary

Courier-Journal columnist Billy Reed spent several evenings working and relaxing at the Beverly Hills Supper Club, where hundreds lost their lives in a Saturday night fire. This story contains his memories and impressions.

By **BILLY REED**  
Courier-Journal Columnist

The Beverly Hills Supper Club was one of the last reminders of the sinful old days when Newport, Ky., was nationally known as the hottest little town this side of Las Vegas.

In those days, the late 1940s and '50s, Newport was a haven for rackets and racketeers. The McClellan committee of the U.S. Senate once identified Newport as the clearing house for all illegal gambling activity in 14 states.

The Beverly Hills was a swanky casino-nightclub that catered to big-time entertainers, gamblers and mobsters. To this day, legends persist about machine-guns mounted along the winding drive leading up to the club, about million-dollar card games, about mob chieftains who brought in their molls to play the roulette wheels and slot machines.

Take Trigger Mike Copollo, for example. In the old days, Trigger Mike was a local gangster who supposedly had ties to The Mob. He thought so much of the Beverly Hills that he got married in the casino's chapel.

In recent years, even without the gamblers and hoodlums, the Beverly Hills continued to thrive as a legitimate, first-class nightclub. It was closer to a Vegas showroom than anything else in the Midwest, and lots of big-time entertainers per-

See **BEVERLY**  
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Continued From Page One

formed there between Vegas engagements and television shows.

In the past couple of years, I spent four or five evenings at the Beverly Hills, sometimes for pleasure, sometimes for duty. I went there to do columns about Dionne Warwick, the Righteous Brothers and Jerry Lee Lewis, who all appeared in the 1,200-capacity Cabaret Room.

A couple of years ago, I spoke at the Newport High School sports banquet in the Empire Room—one of the club's large private dining rooms. I remember the kids all got a thrill when Joey Heatherton, the featured entertainer at the time, walked through the main bar.

What kind of place was the Beverly Hills?

Plush, in a word.

To get there, you drove south on U.S. 27 through Southgate, Ky. The Beverly Hills was on the right, situated atop a hill. The winding road leading up the hill was flanked by what appeared to be torches.

Once you pulled up to the main door, an attendant stepped forward to park your car. At the Beverly Hills, you weren't allowed to park your own car, even if you wanted to. Everything was done by the attendants.

Going through some swinging glass doors, you walked through a lighted lobby into the main bar. The bar was oval-shaped, with a copper top. The decor was posh — subdued lighting, thick carpeting, oil portraits and tapestries hanging on the walls.

You had to go through the bar to get to the large public dining room, the private dining rooms and the Cabaret Room. When I expressed surprise that there were so many rooms, a bartender explained to me that, in the old days, lots of the rooms were used for slot machines, roulette wheels and poker games.

To get to the Cabaret Room, the showroom where all the big-time entertainers performed, you had to turn right off the main bar and walk down a long corridor. As far as I can remember, the corridor was the only way to get in or out of the Cabaret Room.

Inside, tables were clustered on several levels around a semi-circular stage. The tables mostly were small, suitable for two people. Each was equipped with red tablecloth, candle inside a red glass jar, ashtray, and card announcing the coming attractions.

You paid a set fee to get into the room — seems to me as if it were \$10 a person, something like that — and that entitled you to see the show, plus two drinks.

another flight of stairs to the star's dressing room.

Yesterday, a friend who was there Saturday night told me this was the route she and her husband had used to escape.

The times I saw acts in the Cabaret Room, it wasn't very crowded. Half full, at the most. However, that wasn't the case Saturday night. The room was filled to overflowing, according to newspaper accounts.

And it also was that crowded Friday night, according to Bill Malone of Louisville, a friend of mine who was there.

"I got there at about 11:30 p.m.," said Malone, "and the corridor to the Cabaret Room was full of people waiting to get in. Finally the maitre d' came out and asked if anybody wanted a table for two.

"Nobody spoke up, so I pushed up front and grabbed it. Inside, it was so crowded you could hardly move. When I finally got to my table, which was way up in a corner, I sat down, but didn't even have room to stretch my legs.

"Believe it or not, I thought at the time, 'Boy, wonder what the fire marshal would think about this?'"

Whenever the last show broke up, there always was a mob waiting at the main door for the attendants to bring their cars from the parking lot. Rather than fight the mob, I usually waited in the main bar until the crowd thinned out.

I liked the Beverly Hills. It was fun and it was classy and it was different. I used to try to imagine what it was like in the old days, when the wheels were spinning and the dice were rolling, but I never dreamed it would be the scene of a holocaust.

After all, more than anything, the Beverly Hills was a monument to fun.

Generally, the entertainers did an early show and a late one. Folks who wanted to tie in the show with dinner could eat, then go to a show, or vice versa. Generally, the busiest time was around 10 o'clock, when the first-show crowd was leaving and the second-show crowd was coming in.

People dressed up to go to the Beverly Hills. It wasn't the sort of place where you wore jeans or T-shirts. Lots of the men wore ties and the women often wore long dresses and their best jewelry. The Beverly Hills was like that. You dressed up and you felt lucky if you could get out for less than \$50 a couple.

The last time I was there, last summer, I went backstage to interview Jerry Lee Lewis. To get to his dressing room, I walked up two or three steps at the side of the stage, through a door, down a corridor and then up

## Blaze ranks among worst in U.S. history

Associated Press

The death toll in Saturday night's fire at the Beverly Hills Supper Club in Southgate, Ky., makes it one of the worst fire disasters ever in the United States.

The highest number of fatalities recorded in a fire in a U.S. building was Dec. 30, 1903, when 602 people died at the Iroquois Theater in Chicago.

The worst fire in a U.S. nightclub was at the Cocoanut Grove in Boston when 491 people died Nov. 28, 1942.

Other major fire disasters in the United States include one at a Columbus, Ohio, penitentiary on April 21, 1930, that killed 320; a fire at a Brooklyn, N.Y., theater on Dec. 5, 1876, that killed 295, and the Chicago fire of Oct. 8, 1871, in which an estimated 250 perished.

Worldwide, the worst fire in history occurred at a theater in Canton, China, in May 1845, killing 1,670 people, according to the Guinness Book of World Records.



Staff Photo by Keith Williams

The body of a fire victim is removed from the temporary morgue at the Fort Thomas Armory after being identified.

## Three arrested for looting cars, bodies at fire

Associated Press

SOUTHGATE, Ky. — Three people were arrested Saturday night for taking valuables from cars and bodies of the victims of the fire at the Beverly Hills Supper Club.

"People were looting bodies," said Mayor Ken Paul. "I couldn't believe it. They were ransacking the cars. Can you believe it, we caught people taking stuff off those dead people."

Police charged Mohamad Noorzad, 31, of Cincinnati, with abuse of a corpse and resisting arrest; Slarash Noorzad, 32, of Cincinnati, with resisting arrest; and a juvenile with abuse of a corpse, according to the Fort Thomas police department.

The three were to appear in Southgate city court tomorrow.

The sentence for abuse of a corpse is up to one year in jail and a \$5,000 fine.



Staff Photo by Keith Williams

After bodies were identified by relatives, they were removed from the morgue set up at the Fort Thomas

Armory and taken to a long line of hearses waiting outside.



Staff Photo by Keith Williams

Campbell County Coroner Dr. Fred Stine said yesterday that there was no chance survivors could still be buried in the rubble of the burnt-out Beverly Hills Supper Club in Southgate, Ky., near Newport. Stine estimated there many bodies still to be dug out, however.

## Smoke inhalation blamed for many of fire's deaths

Associated Press

Most of those who died in the Beverly Hills Supper Club fire were victims of smoke inhalation rather than fatal burns.

"Basically what happens is you suffocate," said an official at the New York Hospital Burn Center in describing the effects of smoke inhalation.

Assistant Director Christina Haas said the symptoms are similar to those of carbon monoxide poisoning, which kills someone in an enclosed space where an automobile engine has been left running.

In an enclosed space such as the Beverly Hills, the smoke drastically reduces the amount of oxygen and releases carbon monoxide. Sucked into the lungs, the carbon monoxide gets into the blood and inhibits the entry or distribution of oxygen in the system.

People overcome by smoke inhalation sometimes die even after they have reached the open air, usually because they have absorbed so much carbon monoxide that they die before help can be given, burn center officials said.

Smoke inhalation is a reversible condition if skilled help is immediately available to administer oxygen, the burn center said.

# The victims: Some of them are identified

From Staff and AP Dispatches

The following victims of the Saturday night fire at the Beverly Hills Supper Club in Southgate, Ky., have been identified. Seven Louisvillians are among the Kentuckians known last night to have died in the blaze.

One of the victims was identified as **Clarkie Mayfield**, 35, head football coach at Jacksonville State University in Jacksonville, Ala., a native of Harlan, Ky.

School officials said Mayfield was killed when he attempted to rescue persons trapped inside the burning building. Members of his family in the supper club escaped the fire, but school officials said the coach returned to the burning building to aid others.

Mayfield coached football at LaRue County and Franklin-Simpson. A graduate of the University of Kentucky, he joined Jacksonville State's coaching staff in 1969 and became head coach in 1974.

Mayfield's survivors include his wife, Susie, and his 11-year-old son Greg. Funeral arrangements are incomplete.

The following is a list of other victims identified so far in Saturday's fire:

## Louisville area

**George R. Walker Jr.**, 32, of 8607 Farmsfield Court, Jeffersonton. He was a pharmacist. He was an assistant manager of the Super X Drug Store in Fern Creek for the past year and a half and had worked for the parent company since 1967.

He was a veteran of the Vietnam War and had served in the Army Medical Corps. He was a member of the Southeast Christian Church, the American and Kentucky Pharmaceutical Associations and the Jefferson County Academy of Pharmacists.

Survivors include his wife, Mrs. Sandy Tudor Walker, who survived the fire; two sons, Randy and Glenn Walker, and his mother, Mrs. Vivian Walker.

The funeral will be at 2:30 p.m. tomorrow at the Chapel of Resthaven Memorial Park, with entombment in Resthaven Memorial Park Mausoleum.

The body will be at O. D. White & Sons Funeral Home, 2727 S. Third St., after 2:30 p.m. today.

The family requests that expressions of sympathy take the form of contributions to the Christian Academy of Louisville.

**Carl Krigbaum Jr.**, 55, of 321 Idlewyde, Louisville. He was a supervisor in the

buffing department of American-Standard, where he had worked for 36 years. He was a native of Louisville, a veteran of World War II and a member of Jeffersonstown Lodge 5 of the Order of Moose and the Watkins Memorial Methodist Church.

Survivors include his wife, the former Betty McGuire, who survived the fire; a half-sister, Mrs. Elizabeth Waren of Hodgenville, and two half-brothers, David and Hubert Durbin, both of Louisville.

The funeral will be at 2 p.m. tomorrow at Ratterman's, 3711 Lexington Road, with burial in Resthaven Memorial Park. The family will be at the funeral home from 7 to 9 p.m. today.

**Mrs. Nell Reynolds**, 71, of 1010 Bluegrass Ave., Louisville. She was an employe in the alteration department of Byck's downtown store. She was a member of the Lynnhurst United Church of Christ.

She is survived by a son, George Reynolds of Nashville, Tenn.; three daughters, Mrs. Mary Hinkle of Taylorsville, Mrs. Lucy Fleming of Nashville, and Mrs. Arlene Burdette of Knoxville, Tenn., and 11 grandchildren.

The funeral will be at 3 p.m. tomorrow at Nunnelley Funeral Home, 4327 Taylor Blvd., with burial in Louisville Memorial Gardens West.

**Phyllis Ann Tyra**, Louisville.  
**Nell Reynolds**, Louisville.  
**Dora Tyra**, Louisville.  
**Donna Sue Scaggs**, Louisville.  
**Diana Lou Tyra**, Louisville.

## Kentucky

**Otilia Vollman**, Newport.  
**Jean Darlene Noe**, Covington.  
**Patricia Matilda Bezold**, Alexandria.  
**Scott Martin**, Cynthiana.  
**James P. Lyon**, Fort Mitchell.  
**Monica Lyon**, Fort Mitchell.  
**Norbert Castelli**, Crittenden.  
**Helen Castelli**, Crittenden.  
**Robert Roden**, Covington.  
**Paula Lyn Neill**, Lakeside Village.  
**Everett Neill**, Lakeside Village.  
**Ellman Ellison**, Covington.  
**Nora Lee Ellison**, Covington.  
**John Ström**, Lexington.  
**James Kenton Brown**, Lexington.  
**Maxine Butler**, Ashland.  
**Don Grogan**, Murray.  
**Robert Burns**, Ashland.  
**Frank Greer**, Florence.  
**Mary Ann Work**, Covington.  
**Willard T. Fryman**, Cynthiana.  
**Martin Fryman**, Cynthiana.  
**Fredrica Fryman**, Cynthiana.  
**Tracy Fryman**, Cynthiana.  
**Minda Marie Moford**, Dover.

## Ohio

**Robert Douglas Cottongim**, 32, and **Mrs. Carol Woodruff Cottongim**, 32, of Hamilton. She is formerly of Shelby County, Kentucky.

There will be joint funeral services at 2:30 p.m. tomorrow at Shannon Funeral Home in Shelbyville, Ky., with burial in Grove Hill Cemetery. The bodies will be at the funeral home after 1 p.m. today.

The Cottongims were members of the Front Street Presbyterian Church. He was an Air Force veteran and supervisor of nuclear medicine at Mercy Hospital in Hamilton and the McCullough-Hyde Hospital, Oxford, Ohio. She was a teacher at the Edgewood Elementary School, Butler County, Ohio.

They are survived by a daughter, **Leigh Ann Cottingim**.

Robert Cottongim's survivors include his parents, Mr. and Mrs. James E. Woodruff Sr. of Kansas City, Mo., and a grandmother, Mrs. Bessie Covington of Jackson, Miss.

The family requests that expressions of sympathy take the form of contributions to the First Presbyterian Church, Shelbyville, or the Front Street Presbyterian Church, Hamilton, or the Mercy Hospital, Hamilton.

**Tammy Kincer**, Lebanon.  
**Ruth Bachus**, Cincinnati.  
**Anna M. Freshner**, Lebanon.  
**Jean Baker**, Dayton.

**Warren Baker**, Dayton.  
**Glenna Turner**, Spring Valley.  
**Harold Russell Penwell Jr.**, Dayton.  
**Maragaret Elizabeth Phillips**, Liberty.  
**Mary A. Schrantz**, Cincinnati.  
**Joseph Schrantz**, Cincinnati.  
**James Crane**, Waynesville.  
**L. J. Prugh**, West Carrollton.  
**Gary Prugh**, Kettering.  
**Ethel Prugh**, West Carrollton.  
**Terri Rose**, Deer Park.  
**Gloria Sue Duncel**, Hamilton.  
**Robert Thornhill**, Delhi Township.  
**Martin Barker**, Trenton.  
**Mabel Barker**, Trenton.  
**Stuart Cokley**, Cincinnati.  
**Lucy King**, Hamilton.  
**Robert Kettman**, Cincinnati.  
**Susan Kettman**, Cincinnati.  
**Minda Moford**, Dover.  
**Charles Sherwood**, Dayton.  
**Richard Poky**, Cincinnati.  
**Donald Koontz**, Hamilton.  
**George Polley**, Ironton.  
**Polly Polley**, Ironton.  
**Opal Stewart**, Dayton.  
**Grace Fall**, Middletown.  
**George Zorich Sr.**, Cheviot.  
**Annale Reinichi**, Kettering.  
**Everett Neill**, Cincinnati.  
**Paula Lynne Neill**, Cincinnati.  
**Robert F. Zadek**, Cleves.  
**Percy M. Shephard**, Cincinnati.  
**Fred E. Wade**, Dayton.  
**Martha Wade**, Dayton.  
**Betty Wilson**, Miamisburg.

**Rosemary Tilley**, Kettering.  
**Barbara Hous**, Trotwood.  
**James Fowler**, Ironton.  
**Gertrude Williams**, Dayton.  
**Paul Herman Smith**, Cincinnati.  
**Felton B. Harrison**, Dayton.  
**Ruth Patterson**, Coalgrove.  
**Mary Pitsenbarger**, Greenville.  
**Etta Leis**, Williamsburg.  
**Nolan Pitsenbarger**, Greenville.  
**Steven Taylor**, Cincinnati.  
**Laura Sykes**, Harrison.  
**Robert Sykes**, Harrison.  
**Alma Schnapp**, Miamisburg.  
**John Beavers**, Grove City.  
**Harry Hodges**, Columbus.  
**Mary Vogel**, Cincinnati.  
**Doris Brown**, Dayton.  
**Ary Prugh**, West Carrollton.

## Other states

**Douglas George Herro**, Canoga Park, Calif.  
**Roselle Shuman**, Lawrenceburg, Ind.  
**Paul Kiser**, Murfreesboro, Tenn.  
**Sharon Littrell**, Lawrenceburg, Ind.  
**Gary Lee Littrell**, Bright, Ind.

## Other victims

The addresses of the following victims could not be determined last night:

**Barbara Behrer**.  
**Thomas W. Behrer**.  
**Robert Seaman**.  
**Virginia Rait**.



Gov. Julian Carroll  
"... appalled, shocked"

# Ky. officials, club ignored codes before fatal blaze

FORT MITCHELL, Ky. (AP) — State officials and the owners of the Beverly Hills Supper Club had disregarded fire code violations before a May 28 fire that killed 164 persons, a state report says.

Gov. Julian Carroll told reporters last night that Fire Marshal Warren Southworth and two other officials in the fire marshal's office had been suspended for "ineffective enforcement generally of the law."

Suspended along with Southworth were Stanley Boyd, head of the division for new construction, and John Bramlage, northern Kentucky field representative.

The report, which will be made public today during testimony by Carroll before a congressional subcommittee hearing, noted that the man who was fire marshal in 1971 approved specifications for remodeling the club despite 10 violations of the fire and safety code.

Carroll said the report shows that construction was started without correcting the violations despite assurances that they would be corrected.

"I am appalled, shocked and disturbed at the disregard shown for human life," Carroll said.

Carroll also lashed out at the owners of the club, saying they "showed a total disregard for the safety of the Beverly Hills club."

"Not only did they construct in clear violation of the law, but they operated in violation of the law and then failed to use reasonable care to evacuate the premises."

James Osborne, an attorney for the owners, said last night he had not read the report and would have no immediate comment.

The report contained these observations:

- Elegant decorative paneling at the club

had a flame spread index about equal to that of paper.

• The club had only about half as many exits as it should have had and was overcrowded the night of the fire. Investigators estimated that at least 1,300 persons were in the Cabaret Room at the time of the fire, while state officials estimated the legal capacity at 536.

• Aisles and ramps of the Cabaret Room, where the crowd was gathered for a show by singer John Davidson, were jammed with tables and chairs. "When it was necessary to evacuate the Cabaret Room, these tables and chairs proved to be a major impediment to egress," the report said.

• Unenclosed spiral stairs leading to the second floor of the two-story club constituted a "critical violation" of national building codes.

"This nonenclosure of the stairway to the

Crystal Room meant there was no real exit to the second floor," said Dr. Ovid Lewis, a Northern Kentucky University professor who helped with the investigation.

A series of officials performed an "incredible amount of passing the buck," Lewis said.

The report was compiled from more than 12,000 pages of transcripts of about 600 formal statements taken by police from those who were at the club the night of the fire.

Carroll is scheduled to disclose the results of the investigation in Cincinnati, across the Ohio River from Fort Mitchell, before a congressional subcommittee examining a proposed national fire code.

The hearing is the second on a bill by Rep. Thomas Luken, D-Ohio, which would authorize the Dept. of Commerce to study the possibility of a national fire code.

TUCSON, TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 1977

## Club's doors locked, witness says

CINCINNATI (AP) — A waitress working at the Beverly Hills Supper Club the night a fire killed 164 persons told a House subcommittee yesterday that fire doors in the building were routinely kept locked and an exit sign was posted over a door that led nowhere.

Janetta Johnson, who was injured trying to get out of the overcrowded Cabaret Room, also said aisles leading to the room's single exit were blocked by tables and chairs.

"It was like trying to get an egg into a Coke bottle," she said of the jam-up at the door.

"I just knew that smoke was going to kill me. People were screaming and pushing trying to get through that single exit door."

Johnson said she had seen the fire doors unlocked "perhaps eight times" in the two years she worked there. She testified she saw an employe unlock back fire doors the night of the May 28 fire.

She was one of a series of witnesses testifying about the fire before the subcommittee on consumer protection and

finance of the House Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce.

Johnson, of Erlanger, Ky., said people were very orderly at the outset, but were "hindered by chairs and tables in the ramps and aisles. I looked back and the smoke was so black it was like crude oil rolling in the air."

Johnson said the aisles were so congested as the crowd tried to go through two single doors into a bar service area that she jumped atop a table and ran across tables to one of the doors.

Johnson said there was no direct exit from the Cabaret Room, and that a painted red and white exit sign was mounted above a closet.

Janet Zorich of Mack testified how her husband George, a volunteer fireman, lost his life trying to save others.

"All my jewelry started to melt. I had my dress to my face trying to breath. I must have passed out," she said. "When I woke up, I was outside and my husband said he was going back in for his dad and aunt. 'I never saw him again.'"

THE ARIZONA DAILY STAR

# Fear of the dark haunts youth since Ky. club fire

HIGHLAND HEIGHTS, Ky. (AP) — Six months after his quick action saved hundreds in one of the worst fires in U.S. history, former busboy Walter Bailey lives in fear of the dark.

Like other survivors of the Beverly Hills Supper Club holocaust, Bailey says he can't shake the nightmare of the May 28 blaze that killed 164 persons.

"Dark places remind me of the Cabaret Room ... the smoke ... the moaning ... when I was grabbing arms and pulling people from a pile," he said in an interview.

"Living with my family has helped. If I lived by myself, I'd hear the voices. The sounds still bother me," said the 19-year-old Bailey, a freshman at Northern Kentucky University who is studying to become a doctor.

"Symbols often come up that remind me of the fire. Once I caught a mouse in a mousetrap. That triggered some bad memories. Another time, I was driving home in the dark and thought I saw a body by the road.

"I have a lot of morbid thoughts, but I'm trying to forget them."



Bailey

When the fire broke out, Bailey interrupted a comedy team act by jumping on stage and pointing out exits. Within minutes, deadly smoke had filled the room where more than 1,300 persons were waiting to hear singer John Davidson.

It was the worst nightclub fire in the United States since the Coconut Grove blaze in Boston, which claimed 491 lives on Nov. 28, 1942.

Owners of the nightclub already face damage suits totaling more than \$1.5 billion. An investigation by the state of Kentucky said the Cabaret Room, where Davidson was to have appeared, contained 800 persons more than fire regulations allowed.

Since the fire, Bailey has received more than 150 letters, including commendations from President Carter, Henry (The Fonz) Winkler and the state of Oklahoma. But they did little for his welled-up emotions. Finally, his anguish grew into rage.

"One night I threw a fit and cried all night," said Bailey, who lives with his divorced mother and three younger brothers.

He has refused to draw out of a trust fund set up by well-wishers for his education.

"I'm broke right now, but I don't think I need it," he said. "I think I'll need it worse in four years when I hopefully enter medical school."

He works two nights a week now, at a job provided by a Cincinnati hotel manager, Jeff Ruby, who survived the fire.



# THE FIRE THAT STILL RAGES

Beverly Hills Supper Club, which touted itself as the Showplace of the Nation, captured attention the night of May 28, 1977, as fire destroyed it and eventually killed 165 people. It has been 20 years since that dreadful night, but for many, the memories are as bright as the flames

As the nation prepares for Memorial Day, the Cincinnati area pauses in remembrance of a conflagration whose embers still smolder.

The fire at the Beverly Hills Supper Club was a night of horror and heroism, of unspeakable carnage and unshakeable courage. Whether or not you witnessed the blaze, which eventually killed 165 people, your life was affected by it.

The revolution in class action litigation, the exposure of the dangers of certain kinds of construction materials and the revision of building and fire codes have reached every community in America.



**20  
years  
later,  
a grim  
legacy**

For those who were touched by the horror, memories of the fire at the Northern Kentucky club on May 28, 1977, torments like an unfinished novel. It may be the absence of criminal charges against those responsible for the causes of the fire. It may be lack of a permanent memorial to the victims. And it may be the painful realization that the passage of years, population growth in the Tri-state and fresher, bigger national tragedies will inevitably blur the memory of that red-eyed, red-skied night.

Twenty years after that mournful evening *The Enquirer* revisits the fire at Beverly Hills. This recollection and recitation of the heroic actions of those who tried to save the victims, and who did save most of the patrons, is an obligation of the anniversary. Lives were lost, but the virtue of those who struggled to help others endure must be recalled and honored.

-The Editors

THE BEVERLY HILLS FIRE  
A DESPERATE RESCUE

# WHERE HORROR AND HEROISM PREVAILED

*Two souls linked forever by a blaze still burning*

BY ROB KAISER  
The Cincinnati Enquirer

On a hillside, hard by Interstate 471 in the Northern Kentucky town of Southgate, rusty sheets of pressed tin lie stacked amid the weeds. A muddy, white statue, separated from its head, lies in the brush like a slumbering ghost. Red-and-yellow fire hydrants stand as memorials to the night when they weren't nearly enough.

This is prime property. But nothing has been built here since the Beverly Hills Supper Club burned 20 years ago this Wednesday, killing 165 people. It is a hillside lost, out of use and unchanged, a hole in space and time.

Even now, it's May 28, 1977, on this quiet hill. The wind whispers: It's May 28, 1977, toward twilight, and the club's final act has begun. Comedians Teter and McDonald have been upstaged by a fire that will burn for 20 years -- first, in the rooms of the doomed supper club; later, in the chambers of a thousand hearts.

The dead and dying lie everywhere.

"I need help!" firefighter Bruce Rath screams.

This woman sprawled near the club's wedding chapel, this Karen Prugh: She reminds Bruce of his wife. He leans into the lonely fight for her life, vowing to stay with her till she breathes again -- or till death do they part.



Heroism: Fort Thomas firefighter Bruce Rath looks up into the glare of a news photographer's flash. Having pulled Karen Prugh out of the inferno, he successfully revived her and accompanied both her and her sister-in-law to the hospital. Both women survived. QZ00M



Lobby destroyed: The plush lobby where patrons enjoyed cocktails at the bar was reduced to a mass of tangled wiring and charred timbers. QZ00M

Karen Lee Prugh came to Beverly tonight to see John Davidson. The singer never took the stage.

Instead, it was a fire that made the grand entrance, blowing open the double doors of the Cabaret Room with a theatrical bang as it burst upon the crowd in a dark cloud of smoke.

The lights went out. Some of the people panicked. A man in front of Karen leaped up and began running across tabletops like a squirrel traveling from tree to tree. Martinis and ash trays tumbled to the floor.

"Stop pushing," a woman shouted.

Now, as the stars come out over Southgate, black smoke billows from the doors of the supper club and rises to blot out the heavens. Many will be dead by sunrise, some still clustered around their tables as if waiting for the next act. Many others will relive this night repeatedly, incapable of fresh starts.

For them, this is the last new day.

Strange, now, to think how beautifully it began -- a gift, a grace, a bright spring morning full of promise. The world was ablaze with marigolds, begonias, impatiens, petunias. Time for the annuals to bloom.

It was warm and humid in the way of Ohio Valley days, and as Karen and Terry Prugh dressed for their big night at the Beverly Hills Supper Club, Terry neglected to button his collar.

"You're not wearing a tie?" she asked.

"Too muggy," he said.

Terry, a tall, husky man, never liked dressing up. Karen finally convinced him he should put on a tie, but it took an argument.

"They won't let you in," she said.

## Last hope: Fireman 51

Here lies Karen Prugh, in the grass out back of a burning supper club. Is this where life ends? It depends on Fireman 51.

Karen's last hope is Bruce Rath. He looks like a man in flames. His cheeks are ruddy, his arms orange with freckles. Hair the color of burnt sienna rolls back from his face like brushfire. His eyes are cinders. But it's the fire inside that makes Bruce what he is: indomitable and stubborn and tenacious and brave.

THE BEVERLY HILLS FIRE  
A DESPERATE RESCUE

Where Horror and Heroism Prevailed (continued...)

Bruce has been a volunteer firefighter since 1960, when he finally heeded the childhood call of those big, red engines like generations of other Fort Thomas men. His speech abounds with the imagery of his calling:

*I just got burnt out.*

*His face was red as fire.*

*I'll tell you what sets me on fire: people parkin' in fire lanes at the mall.*

This fire, though: Nothing compares. Nobody's face. Nobody's temper. It's hell.

Years later, when Bruce thinks back on this bright Saturday, he will remember how forgettable it seemed right up till the end. "It was just a day of all days," he will say.

This morning, Fireman 51 and the other volunteers went about their weekend routine. They hosed down the engine-room. They washed the trucks. They took the big engines out for a run.

This afternoon, Bruce and his wife went grocery shopping; a car wreck snarled traffic at U.S. 27 and Temple Place; and a woman in labor checked into St. Luke Hospital East.

She is there, still, that woman, as flames shoot out of the supper club two miles away. Everywhere lives hang in the balance. What of Karen Prugh, lying outside the blazing Cabaret Room? Bruce Rath, his lungs aching, takes a deep breath for her . . .



Searching for causes: Firefighters search remains of the Zebra Room with state investigators several days after most of it was incinerated. A room for small occasions, its paper-veneered paneling looked like shiny rosewood. Investigators determined that the room became a furnace when flashover (simultaneous ignition of all combustible materials) occurred. QZ00M

THE BEVERLY HILLS FIRE  
A DESPERATE RESCUE

Where Horror and Heroism Prevailed (continued...)

"OK," Beverly Cruse said. The petite Highlands cheerleader recognized Bruce as the boy who went tearing past her down the stairs of the school each day at lunchtime, bolting out the door as if to a fire. "Who the heck is that guy?" she had asked her friends.

That's Bruce Rath, they explained. He goes home for lunch. His mom waits for him there.

Margaret Rath inspired in her son a kind of tender devotion not often seen in teen-agers. When a rare disease invaded Bruce's left hip, bringing him to his hands and knees on the sidewalk one day as he walked home from first grade, it was his mother -- a tiny redhead barely five feet tall -- who carried that big boy the rest of the way home.



In ruins: Looking north toward U.S. 27, the collapsed roof of Beverly Hills smolders the morning after the fire. In the top left corner is a round garden and, above it, the club chapel which served as a first-aid and temporary morgue during the fire. Still parked are most of the cars of patrons and club workers. QZ00M

Bruce had to wear a brace on his leg for six years, learning all the while how to rise above fickle circumstance. He surprised everyone by riding his Schwinn. The diseased hip would keep him out of the service; the U.S. Marine Corps refused to take him. But it didn't keep him from playing football or competing in track meets for Highlands.

That night in the high school canteen, Bruce's hip was fine. His feet didn't even touch the floor as he danced with his dream girl. Bruce and Beverly cut a rug till her date cut in, but it soon became clear that Jim Cruse had lost his girlfriend forever. His friends exacted revenge, blackening Bruce's eye one night as he walked Beverly home. But it did no good.

Beverly wore Bruce's ring, then his track medal for winning the state in pole-vaulting. An engagement ring replaced those childhood tokens of affection the Christmas after Beverly graduated. They were married in September 1957.

Weekend Escape

The Prughs of Dayton, Ohio, are supposed to be steeled against life's dark possibilities. All the men are police officers, all the women braced for the worst.

But this . . .

This weekend wasn't supposed to test their mettle.

This was supposed to be a great escape: Karen's first time at Beverly; Terry's, too.

The couple were wed 13 months ago. It's Terry's second marriage, Karen's third. You might say she's unlucky in love. A preacher named Bliss -- the Rev. Bliss B. Cartwright -- officiated at Karen's first wedding. It was cruel irony. The marriage, to a factory worker named William Gay, was rocky and short-lived, ending four years later. He got the '67 Chevy. She got the '64 Corvair.

Karen's second marriage, to a Montgomery County, Ohio, sheriff's deputy named Nels E. Munson, lasted 4 1/2 years. She filed for divorce in July 1975, asking the court to restore her maiden name: Leonard.

Karen started spending time with Terry, a co-worker at the Dayton police department. He's a detective; she enters records into the computer. Terry had just gone through a divorce, too. He and Karen dated only a short time before he asked her to marry him. It was Christmas Eve 1975. His proposal surprised her, coming on the heels of her divorce. "I can't do this," she said.

Three months later, they were standing in front of a judge. Karen, who had broken her leg in a car wreck, recited her wedding vows on crutches.

Tenacity Learned Early

Lives converge in the strangest ways, and nothing's the same forever. One night when Bruce Rath was young and his hair a brighter red, a girl named Nancy Edwards stood him up. That moment would translate into 20 years of marriage to another.

Standing alone in the Highlands High School canteen, his eyes wandered to a girl leaning against the corner booth. She had blue eyes and long, blond hair, and he couldn't stop looking at her. Bruce Rath -- linebacker, running back, little-bit-of-everything -- was lost forever.

This was who he would marry.

"Would you like to dance?" he asked.

The day of their wedding, Bruce worked himself to a frazzle preparing the couple's new apartment for the grand homecoming that would follow their honeymoon in the Smokies. He wanted everything to be perfect, but their apartment wasn't vacant till the day of their wedding.

Frantically, Bruce washed windows, hung curtains and moved in furniture. Then he changed clothes and hurried to church.

As Beverly walked down the aisle, she noticed the face of her betrothed was red as fire.

"What is wrong with you," she whispered when she reached the altar.

"I'm so tired," Bruce said.

The reception was at the Summit Lodge, where so many entertainers have stayed while appearing at Beverly.

### Davidson Packs Them In

The Beverly Hills Supper Club was a bit of Las Vegas in Northern Kentucky, a sprawling entertainment complex with its own resident chorus line and an enormous restaurant.

It was a Northern Kentucky landmark, the self-styled Showplace of the Nation. Several weeks ago, Campbell County High School held its senior prom there. Last night, hundreds of patrons who had paid \$13.95 for the Complete Dinner and Show Package -- appetizer through dessert -- packed the place to see John Davidson perform.

Mr. Davidson, the crooner with the big teeth and bigger hair, gazed out from the stage and noted how crowded the Cabaret Room was. He opted not to venture out among the tables as he sang.

Beverly was packed again tonight. A bankers group. A doctors group. A teachers group. A bar mitzvah. Lots of women. Women love John Davidson. He's the only reason Karen came. She was looking forward to tonight.

With Karen were her husband, Terry; Terry's parents, Ethel and L.J., a retired Dayton police officer; Terry's brother, Gary; and Gary's wife, Shirley. It was the first night out for Gary and Shirley since the birth of their child three months ago. The six had dinner reservations at Alexander's, in Miamisburg, Ohio, after the show.

When the group left Dayton this evening, Karen didn't have a care in the world -- except for her father-in-law's heavy foot.

Teter and McDonald went on performing. On his way past the stage, one patron cracked: "Will the show go on when this is over?"

"We'll start again, I promise you," Jim Teter said.

"Will we have to listen to the same jokes?"

"No, I'll change my routine," Mr. Teter said.

But there would be no second act. The doors through which Karen Prugh and her family had entered the Cabaret Room half an hour before suddenly exploded open, banging against the wall. The monster was upon them.

It mesmerized some, the cloud of smoke-- froze them in place. In others it simply inspired fright: a sinking heart; a knotted stomach; the metallic taste of fear.

Karen turned to Terry. "I'm scared," she said.

"It's all right," he told her calmly.

But as the man in front of them leaped up and began running frantically across tabletops, the lights went out -- even the exit signs -- and the screaming started.

## THE BEVERLY HILLS FIRE

### A DESPERATE RESCUE

The Beverly Hills Fire: A Desperate Rescue

#### Where Horror and Heroism Prevailed (continued...)

"I don't want to ride with Wick," Karen told her husband and his brother. She thought their father was the worst driver in the world. You know police officers. Think they own the road. But guess who drove?

Karen's knuckles were white from Centerville to Cincinnati.

When the Prughs arrived at Beverly, they were ushered down a long hallway. This is strange, Karen thought. Then, suddenly, they were in a huge room with a stage.

The Cabaret Room.

At first, they were seated near an exit. Gary balked. It was too far left of the stage. He asked for a table closer to the center, and the waitress showed them to seats near the back. The Prughs settled there happily and ordered a round of drinks.

Onstage were comedians Jim Teter and Jim McDonald. Their schtick sometimes features a dummy of President Carter. The dummy's head is as big as a grown man's. Karen wondered: When does the real show begin?



Piles of rubble: Dirty dishes remain stacked near the Garden Room with portions of the ceiling collapsed on them. QZOOM

#### Beast Leaps From Hiding

Nobody noticed the fire at first. It was like a movie where you have to wait to see the monster. Somewhere in a wall of the club's Zebra Room: an aluminum wire, a moment in time, a spark.

John Davidson was shaving when his drummer burst into the dressing room. "The building's on fire," the drummer told him.

In the Cabaret Room, a young busboy appeared onstage. When he took the microphone from Jim McDonald, the comedian noticed the teen-ager was trembling.

"Everyone needs to exit the building," the busboy, Walter Bailey, said quietly.

Karen Prugh looked at her husband. Was this part of the show? She never heard the busboy mention fire. Others didn't either. Confused patrons stood slowly and began filing leisurely out of the room, some with drinks in hand.

Table cloths caught fire. A strange smell filled the air.

Karen Prugh struggled to breathe, but a sickening taste filled her mouth and her lungs burned. Before she knew it, she was swept up in the aimless throng.

Terry, standing behind her, put both arms around his wife.

"I love you," she told him. Then she blacked out.

#### Heeding The Call

Bruce Rath's scanner quit barking and spraying just long enough to erupt.

*BooooooWOOOOOOOO-baaaaahhhhh.*

Bruce's eyes left the television and found his wife.

"Attention Southgate firemen.

"Fire Beverly Hills."

Fireman 51 rose from his chair.

Beverly Rath glared at her husband.

Things were tense in the little, gray house on North Fort Thomas Avenue. Bruce and Beverly Rath hadn't spoken much all day, and when they had, the words were brittle. Beverly had wanted to go up on the hill tonight, wanted to see John Davidson. But Bruce refused. He'd seen the lines of people waiting to get in when he went there working late for the phone company.

"It's always too crowded," he had said.

Now here she sat, stuck at home with a recalcitrant husband watching Saturday night reruns. Starsky and Hutch out to break up a mobster's ring. The fireman prefers adventure.

BooooooWOOOOOOOO-baaaaahhhh.

The scanner shrieked again.

"See ya," Bruce told his wife.

"Where are you going?" Beverly said.

"Southgate's tones dropped."

"Yours didn't," she said.

"They will."

Beverly scowled. Watching her husband pull the suspenders of his bunker pants up over the new shirt she bought him, the beige one with the shoestring tie at the neck, she grew even angrier. He was going to ruin it. His new pants, too.

This thing -- it was probably just a brush fire like last week, when construction crews building I-471 had piled debris on the hillside.

"If you leave, I won't be here when you get back," she snapped.

Bruce jammed his feet into the boots he keeps in the closet by the door, and, heading out into the night, said:

"Yeah, right."

He was being stubborn, and his wife didn't appreciate it. But up on that hill, Karen Prugh's life depended on the wide streak of obstinacy in Fireman 51.

### The Run

The Fort Thomas fire department is on a quiet street lined with small businesses and prim homes. Bruce Rath hurried there and jumped on the first pumper leaving.

Hanging onto old No. 604 by the crook of one elbow, he wriggled into his fire coat as the pumper headed south on North Fort Thomas and turned right onto Highland Avenue. They sped west past houses in the twilight, past a savings and loan, past Gray's Deli, past a Gulf station and across Grand Avenue.

On the right, a Boron Oil station flew past. Then the old girls home. And then Bruce Rath saw it: a whip of black smoke.

They descended the hill and turned left onto U.S. 27, losing sight of Beverly Hills for just a moment as they passed Evergreen Cemetery. Then, rounding the bend, they saw their destination: the doomed supper club, belching thick, black smoke against the darkening sky.

## THE BEVERLY HILLS FIRE A DESPERATE RESCUE

### Where Horror and Heroism Prevailed (continued...)

#### The Rescue

Flames shot out of the Beverly Hills Supper Club. The wail of sirens from approaching fire trucks filled the air.

"We've got a hell of a problem up here," Ernie Pretot barked into his police radio.

Those who could find their way out hurried now. A woman in a floor-length pastel evening gown tripped on her hem as she rushed past the hostess station. There was a loud *poof*, and a cloud of thick, black smoke billowed through the hallway after her.



Governor's visit: An unshaven Kentucky Gov. Julian Carroll takes a break the morning after he led a convoy of state troopers to the scene of the worst fire in the commonwealth. QZ00M

Against the tide rushed Bruce Rath, hell-bent on entering the burning building. People were trapped near the Cabaret Room. Lots of people. He lowered his head and plunged inside.

After an especially tough night on the job, a firefighter's helmet is smoky dark on top but remains bright red on the underside of the brim. It's for protection, that helmet. Bruce Rath let it part the smoke ahead of him as he headed down the hallway, turning left first, then right.

He saw the snarl of bodies near the double doors at the end of the hallway. People stacked higher than a grown man. The pile grew as he stared. Panic-stricken patrons in dinner jackets and evening gowns fell and dove, entangling themselves hopelessly. People screamed. Hands clawed at him. He heard a voice and grabbed a woman in yellow.

Karen Prugh.

Bruce carried her outside and set her in the grass. "My family," she said. "Breathe deep," he told her. Then he plunged back in.

Over and over, Fireman 51 dragged people to safety, sometimes two at a time. His lungs started to ache. He saw a woman climbing across tables, her dress ablaze, and grabbing her, threw her down and tatted out the flames.

## May 28, 1997, *The Cincinnati Enquirer*

When he reached down to pick her up, a woman at the bottom of the pile suddenly reached for him. Her face was black with oil and soot. "Please, please, get me out of here," she said. "I have babies at home." Then, reaching out in a panic, she tore off his air mask.

That was it for Fireman 51, who had been laboring to breathe even with the mask. Bruce Rath's world faded to black, and he collapsed inside the burning building.

### Out Of Air

When Bruce Rath came to, his alarm was ringing. He was running out of air. A Covington firefighter stepped on his leg. Bruce was wide awake now, and he was staring right into the face of the girl he had been trying to rescue -- the one who had been scrambling across the tables.

Taking a rope from his helmet, he tied her hands together, threw them over his neck, and dog-walked her across the floor to the door.

Every muscle in his body felt as if it were torn. He couldn't breathe. Carrying 80 pounds of equipment and body after body had worn him down.

"Are you all right?" Covington firefighter Jim McDermott asked.

"Get this damn mask off me," Bruce said. "I can't breathe."

Mr. McDermott rolled him over, took the woman from him, pulled his mask off and unfastened his bunker coat. Then the two of them rolled the woman onto Bruce's coat and dragged her across the grass to safety.

It was Shirley Prugh.

Bruce Rath rested briefly. A woman gave him oxygen from a bottle. He looked around, feeling better physically but now overcome emotionally. Everywhere he looked were bodies. How in hell could this happen?

He started looking for the first woman he had saved.

He started looking for Karen Prugh.

### 'She's Dead'

She thinks her husband is invincible, thinks he can do anything. She trusts in him so deeply, people think she's crazy. That time he went out fishing on the Ohio River with her cousin's husband and daughter and their own two oldest sons: They hadn't come back till after dark.

"What're you worried about?" Beverly asked her cousin. "Bruce would never let anything happen. He'll take care of everybody."

It was after 10 when they returned that night, unharmed but in for trouble. Bruce's mother, Margaret, and Beverly's cousin, were waiting at the dock in Wilder. And they were furious.

But the guys at the fire house could tell you: If they go into a fire, they want Bruce with them. He looks out for his partners.

Beverly lies down on the couch. For once, doubt creeps into her heart. Doubt and fear. Where is the man who stood waiting for her red-faced at the altar?

Where is the boy who took a beating for her one summer night on a quiet street in Fort Thomas?

### Two Lives Saved

Bruce Rath lifts Karen Prugh as she starts to sputter. She coughs, spits up thick, black mucous, then wraps her arms around Fireman 51, clinging to him for dear life. She will ride all the way to the hospital that way. Shirley Prugh will share the ambulance with them.

Having saved Karen and Shirley and delivered them from the hillside, Bruce returns to the fire. He is exhausted, spent. He sits on a wall in front of what used to be the Beverly Hills Supper Club, waiting for a van to take him back to the fire house.

He is dazed, desperately in need of sleep. As he sits there idle, the night begins to catch up with him. They're carrying people past -- some in wire-mesh stokes baskets, others on army stretchers. One after another. A macabre parade. This one to the hospital. This one to the morgue.

A gust of wind that should be refreshing on this muggy night instead plays a horrible prank. It lifts the corner of a sheet off a woman's head, and for a moment, Bruce Rath is staring into the face of death. It is blistered and peeling. The hair is crinkled from heat.

When he finds her, she's on her back in the grass. He can't stop looking at her. Except for the black streaks in her hair, Karen resembles Bruce's wife. She's blond. She's small.

"She's dead," a doctor says, straightening up.

Anger flashes hot across Bruce's brain. He just pulled this woman out of the fire. She was alive. She was worried about her family. How can this guy say she's dead?

"Bullshit," Bruce says.

The doctor bristles.

"I should know," he says.

But Bruce is through listening. He searches carefully for a pulse, pressing his broad, blunt fingers against her pale neck. Nothing. Against her thigh. Is that a glimmer of life? The doctor's long gone.

"I need help!" Bruce screams, then begins mouth-to-mouth resuscitation.

For half an hour, maybe more, he stays there, determined to save this woman, working, working, working -- now blowing into her mouth; now pumping her chest. He gets her back, he loses her. He gets her back, he loses her. He keeps this up, oblivious to the chaos all around him, until finally the spell is broken.

"Hey, fireman," someone yells. But there are firemen all around. Bruce pays no attention, concentrating with all his might on finding a flicker of life in Karen Prugh.

"Fireman 51!"

Bruce looks up. *Foomp*, a flash.

His picture will be in the morning paper.

### The Wait

Beverly Rath stays out on the neighbors' porch talking for a long time before returning home to tuck the kids in bed. She turns out the lights in their rooms, then descends the stairs to watch the news.

She thinks her husband is invincible, thinks he can do anything. She trusts in him so deeply, people think she's crazy. That time he went out fishing on the Ohio River with her cousin's husband and daughter and their own two oldest sons: They hadn't come back till after dark.

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Softly at first, Fireman 51 begins to cry. Then the weeping turns to sobbing, then to nausea. Bruce vomits.

One of the other firefighters says: "How the hell did we get involved in this? When I came out as a firefighter, I thought I'd come out and put out a fire and everybody would say, 'Hey, thanks.' And we'd all go home."

## THE BEVERLY HILLS FIRE

The Beverly Hills Fire: A Desperate Rescue

## DESPERATE RESCUE

### Where Horror and Heroism Prevailed (continued...)

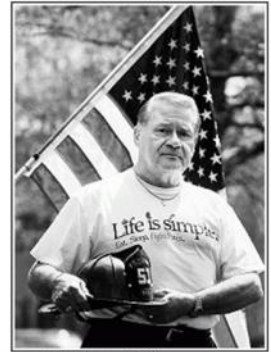
Another says: "Man, state police got here fast."

Bruce looks up and sees two state cruisers coming up the drive, lights flashing. A limousine follows them. From that car, a silver-haired man in a dark suit approaches, tie yanked loose at the neck.

"You all right, son?" Gov. Julian Carroll asks. He was getting ready for bed at the governor's mansion in Frankfort when he heard about the fire.

"I don't know," Bruce says.

"What're you crying for?" Mr. Carroll asks.



Bruce Rath, today. QZ00M

"I can't stop," says Fireman 51.

"Get him a pick-me-up," Mr. Carroll says. Yessir, Gov. Carroll, the trooper says, and heads back to the car.

When he returns, it's with a whiskey bottle, and he pours a shot for Bruce. Fireman 51 doesn't drink whiskey straight, and it goes down like fire. He gasps and coughs.

"Give him another," Mr. Carroll says. "He needs it."

The second cuts through the gunk in his throat. He feels better.



Karen Prugh Leonard, today. QZ00M

"Is it as bad as it looks?" the governor asks, gazing over the hill.

"It's pretty bad," Bruce says.

## May 28, 1997, *The Cincinnati Enquirer*

### 'Here's The Hero'

When Beverly Rath wakes on the couch, it's to the sound of someone coming in the front door.

She smells him before she sees him: the overpowering, acrid odor of the fire. She's always hated that smell. Usually, she makes Bruce take off all his gear downstairs whenever he comes back from a run. But this morning she rushes to him and takes him in her arms.

"Whatsa matter?" he says.

"We were told you got killed in the fire."

"They said my name?"

"No, they just said two firemen got killed."

"Well, I don't know anything about that."

"You're not going out anymore."

"I've got to," he says. There's always the chance there might be another fire, somewhere else in town. Someone has to man the station.

He goes upstairs, showers once, twice, three times. The oily, black goop won't come off. It's caked on his skin, in his hair. So much for the new shirt.

He puts on a clean uniform, heads back out.

When he gets to the station, some of the guys are wandering around the trucks doing the routine, peering at the gauges, checking the air bottles to make sure they're full. Others are in the watch room reading the newspaper.

"Hey, here's the hero now," one says. They've seen the picture, the one that newspaper photographer shot while Bruce was working on Karen. *Fireman 51! Foomp*. It ran in *The Enquirer*, for all the world to see, damsel and white knight, together forever. Bruce Rath, faithful husband, rock-steady Baptist, now has another woman in his life. One night on a hillside, he made a life-and-death commitment to Karen Prugh, and for the rest of his days, those who know the two of them only from the famous photo will connect them, will think of them together when they think of them at all.

But Bruce Rath does not feel like a hero. He is drained. This is the first day of many over the next few weeks that will pass without his being able to keep anything on his stomach.

"You clowns didn't put the flag up yet," he says, spotting the Stars and Stripes still folded up atop the filing cabinet.

"You did everything else tonight," another firefighter says. "You put the flag up."

Tomorrow will be Memorial Day. Bruce Rath flies the flag every day at his house; he has to buy a new one about every two years. But Memorial Day weekend is a must for flag-flying. Bruce has known men who died at war. He picks the flag up gingerly and heads toward the door.

Outside, the sky is growing bright. It's going to be a clear morning, beautiful in the way a summer day can break your heart, and as he walks out of the station the day opens up before him. The day, the weeks, the months. The years after that.

### Forever After

There's a hillside lost. Out of circulation. Good for nothing. Those cleaning up after the fire will leave traces of the nightmare as if they couldn't abandon the site fast enough. Five, 10, 15, 20 years will pass, but nothing will change on that lonely hill. Not even time.

Karen Prugh will discover her marriage died in the fire. She and Terry will drift apart, and in three years they will get a divorce. Terry, who lost his mother, father and brother in the fire, never will be able to talk about what happened up on that hill, though Karen will need to -- at first, anyway. And she will make up her mind not to marry again because it's just too painful feeling alone when you're right next to your husband.

She will panic one day in a grocery in Florida, running out of the store when the lights go out in a storm. She will shy away from movie theaters, too. She will become a nurse and move away to Phoenix, Arizona. But she will never tell most of her new friends what happened that night.

She will resolve never to go back to Ohio. She will turn down a job at a hospital in Cincinnati because she doesn't want to be anywhere near that hill. She will think of Bruce Rath every time a firefighter brings someone into the hospital. She will see that fire coming through the doors and the man scampering across those tables.

She will always remember the day she died.

But the fire will not change Bruce Rath. Nothing ever will. He will live long and full. Some firefighters will quit in the days and weeks ahead, ruined by last night. But Bruce will fight fires for another 19 years, until he retires, and not once will he make a run that defeats him.

The Beverly Hills fire will haunt him awhile. He will look for the exit signs whenever he goes out to eat. He will dream of a hand reaching up and pulling off his air mask. He will wake jabbering and thrashing, throwing elbows until his wife protests. But as time passes, he will bounce back and the dreams will stop. And that hand will stop reaching up to pull off his air mask.

Beverly Rath is the only woman who can take Bruce's breath away. Twenty years later, when they are grandparents, Bruce will look one day at a picture of her as a girl in a satin dress and tell her: "You haven't changed a bit."

And she will say: "Yeah, right."

But before any of that comes to pass, Bruce must do one thing.

He stands at the flag pole outside the fire house, snaps the Stars and Stripes into the eyelets there, then lets it go. This much he can do for his grieving, little town. If life is worth saving, it's sure as hell worth living.

During the darkest hours of the fire, the lone woman in labor at St. Luke had her baby early this morning, at 1:01 -- one small hope after midnight. That should be enough. The human heart burns with a fire all its own.

Bruce gives it a crank, and the flag unfurls against the brightening morning, rising:

Up, up, up:

Into the radiant sky of a brand-new day.



**THE BEVERLY HILLS FIRE**  
TRAGEDY ROOTED IN CODE VIOLATIONS

THE CINCINNATI ENQUIRER

# HOW IT HAPPENED

Mid-afternoon on May 28, 1977, employees were busy preparing for a hectic night. Headliner John Davidson plus five private parties were sure to pack the house. The Southgate supper club will be occupied by at least 1,600 guests and perhaps as many as 3,400, plus 182 employees.



### The day of the fire

**4 p.m.** A wedding reception is held at the site. The reception begins in the South Gate.

**4:30 p.m.** The reception begins in the South Gate.

**5:30 p.m.** A traffic jam occurs in the city during the fire. A large number of cars are stuck in traffic on the highway. A large number of cars are stuck in traffic on the highway.

**6:00 p.m.** A wedding reception is held at the site. The reception begins in the South Gate.

**6:30 p.m.** A wedding reception is held at the site. The reception begins in the South Gate.

**6:00 p.m.** A wedding reception is held at the site. The reception begins in the South Gate.

**6:30 p.m.** A wedding reception is held at the site. The reception begins in the South Gate.

**7:00 p.m.** A wedding reception is held at the site. The reception begins in the South Gate.

**7:30 p.m.** A wedding reception is held at the site. The reception begins in the South Gate.

**8:00 p.m.** A wedding reception is held at the site. The reception begins in the South Gate.

### Cross-section of construction

**Code violations**  
Violations were reported and corrected. The building was inspected and found to be in violation of the code. The building was inspected and found to be in violation of the code.

**Wiring**  
The wiring was not up to code. The wiring was not up to code. The wiring was not up to code.

**Fireproofing**  
Fireproofing is required for each 1,000 sq ft of area. The fireproofing was not up to code. The fireproofing was not up to code.

**Roof support**  
There were no intermediate roof supports in place. The roof support was not up to code. The roof support was not up to code.

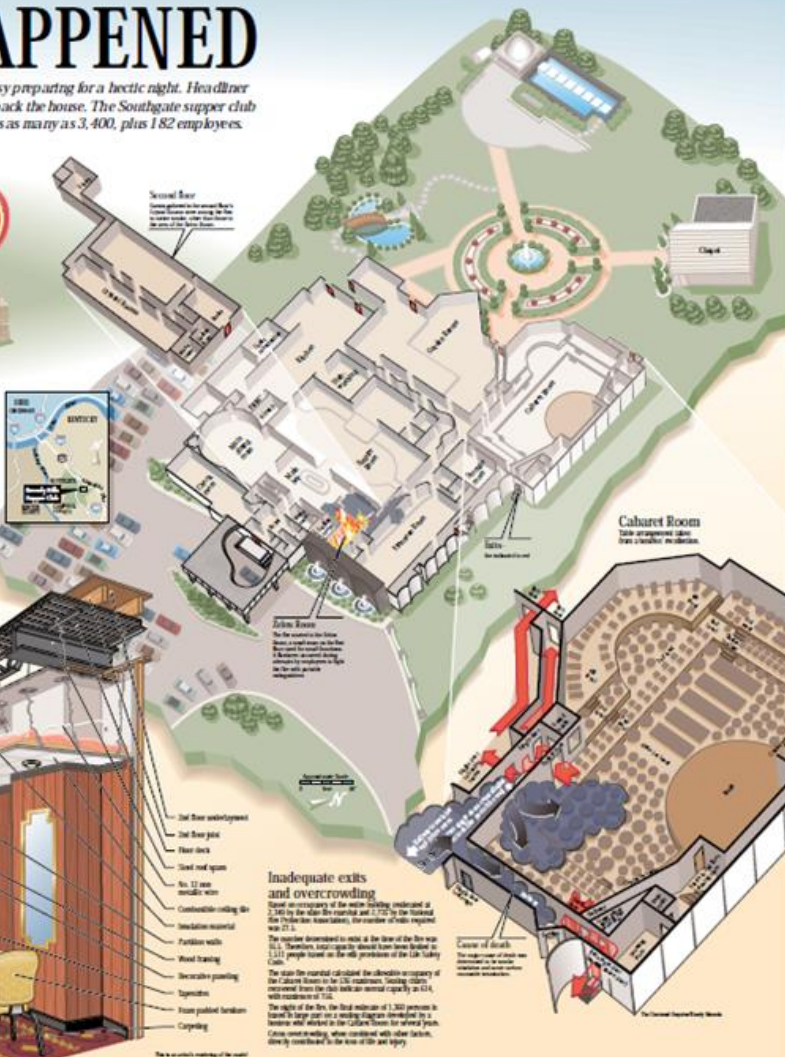
**Roof space**  
Roof space reserved from wall to wall. The roof space was not up to code. The roof space was not up to code.

**Metal studs**  
Construction and structural materials used. The construction was not up to code. The construction was not up to code.



### Inadequate exits and overcrowding

Stated occupancy of the main building... The building was overcrowded. The building was overcrowded. The building was overcrowded.



## A CHRONOLOGY

- 1977: The original Beverly Hills nightclub... [Detailed chronological list of events from 1977 to 1980, including construction milestones, fire incidents, and regulatory actions.]
- 1977: The original Beverly Hills nightclub...
- 1978: The original Beverly Hills nightclub...
- 1979: The original Beverly Hills nightclub...
- 1980: The original Beverly Hills nightclub...

Source: The Cincinnati Enquirer, Cincinnati, Ohio, May 28, 1977.

THE BEVERLY HILLS FIRE  
TRAGEDY ROOTED IN CODE VIOLATIONS

# A CHRONOLOGY

**1937:** The original Beverly Hills nightclub is built by Pete Schmidt on a 17-acre site along the west side of U.S. 27 in Southgate.

**1961:** After changing hands several times over the years, the club shuts down.

**Oct. 11, 1969:** The Beverly Hills reopens briefly under the ownership of two Atlanta-based partners.

**Dec. 30, 1969:** The club, closed shortly after its reopening, is deeded to the Schilling family, who plan to renovate and expand it.

**April 1970:** The Schillings obtain a building permit for a \$170,000 remodeling.

**June 21, 1970:** A predawn fire destroys much of the unoccupied structure, still under construction. A state arson investigation will prove inconclusive.

**Feb. 10, 1971:** The new Beverly Hills Supper Club opens to the public.

**Feb. 26, 1971:** *The Enquirer* reports that the club reopened "without remedying 10 major safety defects outlined by the state," including flaws involving stairway enclosures and exits. The article says the state did not conduct a final inspection at the site and that the state fire marshal had not approved the club for occupancy. Officials in Kentucky play down the controversy, saying they have been assured all hazards have been corrected.

**July 8, 1974:** The Schillings apply for a building permit to add a larger showroom.

**Aug. 10, 1974:** A small fire, apparently caused by a short circuit, breaks out in the club's main electrical control panel. The flames are put out with an extinguisher. An insurance claim puts damage at \$1,635.



Aftermath: Debris from the 1970 fire. QZOOM



New showroom: Richard Schilling, Sr. the owner (left) in the Cabaret Room. QZOOM

**Nov. 11, 1974:** The new showroom, the Cabaret Room, opens to the public.

**1975:** Construction on the Zebra Room, designed to accommodate smaller parties, is completed.

**1976:** Construction on the Garden Room is completed.

**Jan. 27, 1977:** A state-ordered fire inspection concludes that "in case of emergency, evacuation should be no problem with existing exits."

**May 28, 1977:** Fire destroys the supper club.

**May 29, 1977:** The bodies of 26 more victims are removed from the Cabaret Room.

**June 1, 1977:** Two bodies are discovered in the Viennese Room.

**June 2, 1977:** A patron, injured in the fire, sues for damages in federal court, the first such suit to be filed. By 1985, the settlement to victims will reach \$30 million.

**June 25, 1977:** Patricia Brown, 40, of Lexington, Ky., dies of injuries suffered in the fire, bringing the death toll to 163. Her husband was among the dead.

**July 2, 1977:** Clarence Gripshover, 48, of Covington dies of injuries, bringing the death toll to 164. Three couples he had accompanied to the club were among the dead.

**July 13, 1977:** A report by State Trooper Kenneth Wood said "all the physical evidence" pointed to a hidden fire in the Zebra Room and the "only source" of ignition would have been electrical.

**July 18, 1977:** State Police Det. Sgt. James A. Perry reports that some exits had appeared to have been illegally locked.

**Sept. 16, 1977:** Gov. Julian Carroll's special task force files a report calling the Beverly Hills building "an electrician's nightmare" and concludes that "the only participants in the tragedy who were clearly ignorant of the latent danger hidden behind walls and within concealed spaces were the patron-victim." Structural problems, the report said, included substandard wiring, flammable building materials

and a shortage of exits. It said that "many of these code violations were known by the insurer, the operators and owners, and were noted as concerns as a matter of record in the fire marshal's office." Other problems it identified included "gross overcrowding" and "myopic" inspection efforts. The task force found it "baffling" how the state fire marshal's staff failed to communicate adequately with the state Insurance Services Office that repeatedly inspected Beverly Hills during the 1970s and reported fire hazards.

**Sept. 19, 1977:** Gov. Julian Carroll condemns "a shocking amount of complete and total disregard by the owners of Beverly Hills for the safety of the patrons." He predicts indictments.

**Feb. 23, 1978:** A special grand jury is impaneled to investigate whether crimes were committed in connection with the fire. During the coming months, dozens of witnesses testify and hundreds more written statements are submitted.

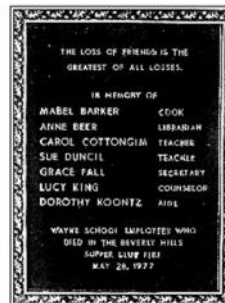
**March 1, 1978:** Barbara Thornhill, 35, of Delhi Township dies at Cincinnati General Hospital, the 165th and final fatality attributed to the fire. The death toll included her husband, his two sisters and his pregnant sister-in-law.

**Aug. 2, 1978:** The grand jury concludes that neither criminal negligence nor structural problems were responsible for the deaths. The jury report blames the victims' "panic" and notes that Cabaret Room patrons, "even though notified to evacuate, failed to react and remained seated until the conditions of the room itself indicated the need to exit. By this time in some instances it was too late."

**February 1979:** A special prosecutor concludes that "nothing is to be gained from additional efforts to pursue criminal prosecution in connection with the fire."

**1980:** Civil suits against the club owners are settled out of court.

**Oct. 18, 1986:** An appellate court rules that the state fire marshal's office has no liability to victims.



THE LOSS OF FRIENDS IS THE  
GREATEST OF ALL LOSSES.

IN MEMORY OF

MABEL BARKER	COOK
ANNE BEER	LIBRARIAN
CAROL COTTONGIM	TEACHER
SUE DUNCAN	TEACHER
GRACE FALL	SECRETARY
LUCY KING	COUNSELOR
DOROTHY KOONTZ	AIDE

WAYNE SCHOEN, EMPLOYEE WHO  
DIED IN THE BEVERLY HILLS  
SUPPER CLUB FIRE  
MAY 28, 1977

THE BEVERLY HILLS FIRE  
A MOUNTING GRIEF

# ARMORY GYM SERVED AS MORGUE

*'It was eerie...I can still view that in my mind.'*

BY WALT SCHAEFER  
The Cincinnati Enquirer

Hoots and hollers echo through the old red brick Fort Thomas Armory on South Fort Thomas Avenue as basketballs arc toward hoops and volleyballs skim over nets.

There are other echoes here, too.

This armory was the makeshift morgue for the dead from Beverly Hills.

"As they came in, we made two rows (of stretchers), one on each end of the basketball courts," said Dr. Fred Stine, who still is Campbell County coroner. "We had one line for the males and one line for the females."

Women, in their panic, left their purses and identifications behind, while most men had wallets. Loved ones could not be matched.

It was a macabre, surreal scene with the gym lights casting a pall over the polished floor.

The night of the fire, the bodies brought in were not burned, Dr. Stine said. But on Sunday, the bodies brought in were burned beyond recognition.



Somber task: Rows of victims were arranged on stretchers in two lines separated by gender. Teams of orderlies, doctors and volunteer nurses assisted in carefully cataloging belongings and identifying victims. QZOOM



Dr. Fred Stine, today. QZOOM

"We kept the bodies in refrigerated trucks at night and brought them back in (to the armory) during the day until they were identified. We used every ounce of embalming fluid in Greater Cincinnati and had to have more flown in," he said.

Despite the harrowing situation, there was a sense of dignity and respect.

"The clergy . . . and the nurses were among the most important people (at the morgue). Families (seeking loved ones) could not come in without clergy. Nurses went down the lines with them, too. There was remarkable order," Dr. Stine said.

"It was a slow process," said Brother Tom Payne, a Marianist, and director of the Cincinnati Police Clergy Crisis Team.

"I most remember the people helping -- the women, nurses on their hands and knees, washing the faces of the victims; trying to put their hair back into some semblance of order -- just to give dignity to these people. And, we had no idea who they were," he said.

"When the families came, we went with them. Remember, most of these people were not burned. They died of smoke. When family members saw them, the skin had been washed; hair pulled back. They were treated with dignity and respect . . . That was very important, I think," said Brother Payne, property manager at Mount St. John, the Society of Mary's provincial headquarters east of Dayton in Greene County, Ohio.

Marty Huskisson, 54, of Cold Spring, was a critical care supervisor at St. Luke Hospital at the time she went to the morgue to help out.

"It was eerie," she said. "I remember taking families to those refrigerated trucks to try to identify the (badly burned). I can still view that in my mind."

"And, the way (the victims) were dressed. They all went out to have a good time. All dressed up. Suits and fancy dresses and high heels. And, they ended up on a gym floor morgue."

THE BEVERLY HILLS FIRE  
A MOUNTING GRIEF

Young volunteers faced finest hour, worst tragedy

# BEVERLY WAS THEIR COMING OF AGE

BY PATRICK CROWLEY  
The Cincinnati Enquirer

When they were boys, growing up on Southgate streets named Harvard, Walnut, Maple and Electric, they went to school together and played wiffle ball against one another.

And they dreamed. Dreamed of the day they could follow the path their fathers and brothers had taken before them.

The day they could become Southgate Volunteer Firemen.

"There is a lot of pride in this community when it comes to the fire department," explained Lt. Eric Muench, a son of a former fire chief.

"We all grew up around this fire department, waiting for the day when we turned 16 and we could join. It's almost like a brotherhood. It's something very special for us."

Seven of them are seated around a table in the fire station. The pride that Lt. Muench spoke of is evident in their crisp white uniform shirts, the immaculate station, the brand-new shiny red pumper that is being paid for with money made at summer festivals and winter turkey raffles.

They are together, as they were when they were kids, as they probably will be until they are old men.

Together as they were that night 20 years ago. It was the department's finest hour and



Rescuers' remembrance: For the first time since the Beverly Hills fire, these seven Southgate firefighters gathered to talk to an outsider about the event that played such a large part in their lives. From left are Lt. Eric Muench, Chief Marc Muench, Assistant Chief Tony Kramer, Firefighter Greg Hirsch, Capt. John Beatsch, Capt. Jim Herman and Lt. Greg Muench. Q200M

its worst tragedy.

"It was," said Captain Jim Herman, "our greatest moment and our worst moment. We rose to the occasion, and did our jobs ...

"But 165 people died," Greg Hirsch said, finishing his fellow firefighter's thought. "But, yeah, we did our jobs. We did what we had to do."

Though Beverly Hills was a mile or so from the firehouse, and these firefighters -- who were in their early 20s and late teens in May 1977 -- were among the first on the scene, this is the first time they've gotten together to talk with an outsider about the fire.

Why has it taken so long?

"I guess because nobody ever asked," said Eric's older brother, Marc Muench, who has followed in his father, Ray's, footsteps as the department's current chief.



Combing for clues: Kentucky State Police Commissioner Kenneth Brandenburg and Southgate firefighters take a break from helping investigators comb the collapsed supper club. Q200M

"It used to make me mad hearing about this hero and that hero when he had 40 guys up there working their butts off for days," said Eric and Marc's brother, Greg.

"But we don't consider ourselves heroes," Chief Muench said. "We took an oath and we did our jobs. That's all."

When the call came over the radio that night, Eric Muench was getting off work as an apprentice meat

cutter at a Covington grocery. A couple of the guys were watching *Emergency*, a television program about paramedics. Firefighter Hirsch was watching TV with his girlfriend.

"They were building (Interstate) 471 at the time, and were having a lot of brush fires up near Beverly," Firefighter Hirsch recalled. "I told my girlfriend I'd be right back because I figured it was just another little brush fire."

Almost as soon as the Southgate firefighters entered the burning building, Chief Ray Muench gave the order to "drop hose." That told his men to concentrate on saving

lives, not fighting the fire.

Their stories are filled with horror, fear and grief. Bodies piled on top of one another. Seared flesh rolling down a victim's arm. The putrid smell of burnt hair. The terror of wondering if that thick black smoke that had wiped out a table of well-dressed diners would claim their young lives, too.

Assistant Chief Tony Kramer says he won't, or can't, forget the gruesome task of moving the dead.

"We took people from inside the club to the chapel out back, where the Red Cross or somebody put a heart monitor on them just in case," he said.

"But they were all dead. So then we carried them out into the yard. It was like an assembly line. It was terrible."

"We were young," said Capt. Herman, "and had not seen things like this. I remember I handled it OK that night, but a few days later I was sitting down to eat a sandwich and that image of 100 dead bodies lined up along the ground, dressed like they were going to a party, hit me and I just burst into tears."

Capt. John Beatsch knows the community appreciates the department's efforts. He remembers the memorial mass held a few days later at St. Therese Church.

"All the firemen were sitting together in the front, and when we marched out the audience, our friends and families, started clapping. It made us feel so good," he said.

"There wasn't a dry firemen's eye as we walked out of that church," Capt. Beatsch said as he wiped a tear from his cheek.

"I think about it and it still gets me."

# 30 years later, survivors relive horror of fire

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[Enlarge](#) By Bob Lynn, Enquirer file photo

Bodies of victims of the Beverly Hills Supper Club fire lie in the temporary morgue at the Armory gymnasium in Fort Thomas, Ky., on May 28, 1977.

By Lori Kurtzman and Scott Wartman, USA TODAY

SOUTHGATE, Ky. — The fire raged and the bodies piled atop the hill. Dottie Eberle sat on a firetruck staring, not believing what she was seeing.

Only hours before, she'd been working as a hostess at the swank Beverly Hills Supper Club in Southgate, Ky., directing guests to their private parties or to the Cabaret Room, where entertainer John Davidson was headlining a 9 p.m. show. She'd just seated a party of 12 when someone mentioned something about a fire in the club's Zebra Room.

It was May 28, 1977.

Eberle was 43, a mother of five. For seven years she'd worked at the Beverly Hills, a glamorous nightspot with crystal chandeliers and spiral staircases, a place unlike anything else in Northern Kentucky. Even on the weekdays, Eberle said, women would enter in full-length gowns and diamonds, escorted by men in tuxedos.

"It was gorgeous," Eberle said, calling it a thrill "just to drive up the driveway and pass the sign that said the 'Beverly Hills Supper Club.'" And now she was watching it all burn down.

On Monday, survivors, former employees and relatives of many of those who died that night will mark the 30th anniversary of the fire with a service at the bottom of the hill that once led to the club. Dave Brock, an 18-year-old busboy at the time and now a grandfather, is organizing the service. He said he thinks it will bring back a lot of memories, both good and bad.

The fire began behind a wall and quickly spread throughout the club, feeding on flammable furniture, tapestries and decorative paneling. It rolled rapidly through the building's main corridor. As many as 3,000 people were thought to be in the building, and they bottlenecked trying to flee through what fire officials later determined were an inadequate number of exits. Many became trapped in the Cabaret Room. By morning, workers had pulled 134 bodies from that one site.

The Beverly Hills blaze would become one of the deadliest nightclub fires in U.S. history, the worst being the 1942 fire in Boston's Coconut Grove nightclub that killed 492. All told, 165 people died in the Kentucky fire, among them husbands and wives who left behind orphans.

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"I just think mentally I was trying to block it out, but I couldn't," Eberle, now 73 and living on the east side of Cincinnati, recalled this week. "I just sat there on that firetruck thinking this did not happen to us. But it did happen."

### **Disaster led to new fire codes**

Much has changed in the three decades since the Beverly Hills fire, and many in this country have been affected.

Fire officials said faulty aluminum wiring was to blame for the blaze, which resulted in a shift to copper alternatives. A number of other factors also might have contributed to the loss of life. Chief among them, said Robert Duval, a senior fire investigator with the National Fire Protection Association, were overcrowding, delayed notification while employees tried to put out the fire and a lack of sprinklers in the 65,000-square-foot building.

The incident at the Beverly Hills caused the NFPA to change its code, which is in use in all 50 states, Duval said. Afterward, the code required new and existing nightclub-like facilities that hold more than 300 people to have fire alarms that included voice messages giving evacuation instructions. It also called for all new nightclubs of that size to be outfitted with sprinklers — a requirement that was extended to all new nightclubs and any existing ones that hold more than 100 people after a 2003 fire at a Rhode Island nightclub killed 100.

"In the fire code business, unfortunately a lot of changes are reactive," Duval said.

The fire's impact also went beyond code changes. It helped add to the growing body of research into post-traumatic-stress disorder through subsequent psychological studies of survivors. It spawned one of the country's first class-action lawsuits involving disasters, netting nearly \$50 million for clients and their lawyers.

And in the months after the fire, hospitals in 33 states and seven countries requested copies of the disaster plan St. Luke Hospital used during the crisis, said the hospital's former CEO, John Hoyle. By coincidence, Hoyle was at the Beverly Hills that night. He called his hospital from a firetruck radio to activate the plan, which has been updated throughout the years.

### **Ghostly reminders still surface**

Only a thick grove of honeysuckle and a cracked driveway remain where the "Showcase of the Nation" once shined on a 78-acre hilltop. Remnants of the nightclub occasionally emerge from the ground. A rotted dress shoe with what appears to be a single mark rests on a pile of debris. Broken cups and plates from the club litter the meadow floor.

"This stuff keeps washing up" after it rains, said Wayne Dammert, who was a waiter and banquet captain during the fire. Dammert sometimes visits the site to care for a 25-foot memorial cross he's built there. He's salvaged menus, candelabras and a rusted table from the wreckage.

Nothing has ever taken the club's place. Vehement public opposition nixed one development company's plan in 1996 to build \$90 million worth of office and retail space at the site. It now belongs to a non-profit company, Life Enriching Communities, which bought the property for \$3.65 million in 2001 and planned to build a retirement community there.

But Southgate City Council has been reluctant to change the zoning to allow that, and Life Enriching Communities has put its plans on hold, said Connie Schmitt, a company spokesperson.

"I don't think anything needs to be built there," said Dana Stallings, who lost her mother, aunt and two pregnant sisters in the fire. "If they are not going to build a memorial, leave it alone."

May 27, 2007, *The Courier-Journal*—  
Courtesy-<http://www.courier-journal.com/apps/pbcs.dll/gallery?>



Firefighters at the Beverly Hills Supper Club fire. (Archive photos from *The Cincinnati Enquirer*)



Bodies lined up in the armory in Ft. Thomas that served as a makeshift morgue after the Beverly Hills Supper Club fire .



Firefighters pulled a body from the rubble of the Beverly Hills Supper Club fire.



Rescue teams brought out the last of the bodies from the Beverly Hills Supper Club fire before ending for the night.



Tom Laver of the Southgate Volunteer Fire Department rested after searching through the rubble of the Beverly Hills Supper Club fire.



Firefighters removed bodies after the Beverly Hills Supper Club fire.

May 27, 2007, *The Courier-Journal*—

Courtesy-<http://www.courier-journal.com/apps/bcs.dll/gallery?Avis=B2&Dato=20070526&Kategori=NEW S01&Lopenr=705260814&Ref=PH>



June 1, 1977: Southgate assistant fire chief John Payne inspected the aftermath



An aerial view of the fire scene.



Survivors gathered outside the supper club.



June 1, 1977: John Davidson attended the funeral of his music director Douglas Geogre Herro who died in the fire.



June 2, 1977: Workers sifted through the rubble after the fire.



May 27, 2007, *The Courier-Journal*—  
Courtesy-[http://www.courier-journal.com/apps/pbcs.dll/gallery?  
Avis=B2&Dato=20070526&Kategori=NEWS01&Lopenr=705260814&Ref=PH](http://www.courier-journal.com/apps/pbcs.dll/gallery?Avis=B2&Dato=20070526&Kategori=NEWS01&Lopenr=705260814&Ref=PH)

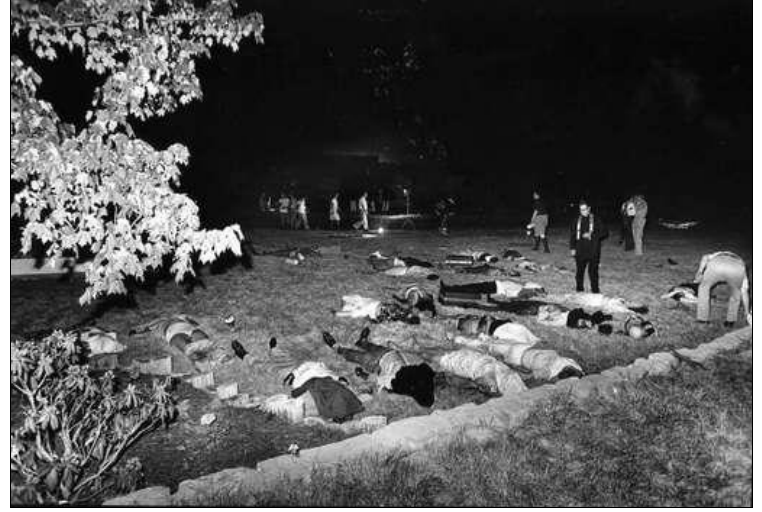


Scenes from the Beverly Hills Supper Club fire, 1977  
(Courier-Journal archives)



May 27, 2007, *The Courier-Journal*—  
Courtesy-[http://www.courier-journal.com/apps/pbcs.dll/gallery?  
Avis=B2&Dato=20070526&Kategori=NEWS01&Lopenr=705260814&Ref=PH](http://www.courier-journal.com/apps/pbcs.dll/gallery?Avis=B2&Dato=20070526&Kategori=NEWS01&Lopenr=705260814&Ref=PH)

Scenes from the Beverly Hills Supper Club fire, 1977 (Courier-Journal archives)



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## Recalling One of America's Worst Tragedies: The Beverly Hills Supper Club Fire

Posted by [Fire Rescue Magazine](#) on May 28, 2010 at 9:00am [View Fire Rescue Magazine's blog](#)

### One of America's Worst Tragedies: The Beverly Hills Supper Club Fire

By *FireRescue magazine editor-in-chief Tim Sendelbach*

On the night of May 28, 1977, the Beverly Hills Supper Club in Southgate, Ky., was the scene of one of the worst nightclub fires in U.S. history. Today marks the 33rd anniversary of that tragedy. Here, we look back at the incident and pay tribute to the firefighters who bravely battled the flames and pulled victims from the burning building. We also remember the 165 people who perished and the 200 who were injured as a result of the blaze.

#### The Incident

The evening of May 28 began as a happy one at the upscale club. Guests were attending a wedding reception in the Zebra Room, while 70s star John Davidson was preparing to entertain a crowd in the nearby Cabaret Room. By 8:30, the wedding reception had ended, and people were starting to complain about the temperature in the room. No one noticed the fire that had started in the room, which continued to go unnoticed for about 25 minutes.

May 27, 2007, *The Courier-Journal*—

Courtesy-<http://www.firefighternation.com/profiles/blogs/recalling-one-of-americas>



FireEMSblogs.com

Beverly Hills Supper Club Fire Remembered,  
A Firefighters Own Worst Enemy

Just before 9 p.m., two waitresses noticed smoke near the ceiling. The fire department was called and arrived within minutes; however, because the fire went unnoticed for about a half hour, it had taken hold of the room and couldn't be contained.

At 9:08 p.m., busboy Walter Bailey told those in the Cabaret Room that they needed to evacuate. Some people followed his instruction and began heading for the exits. (Bailey is considered one of the heroes of the tragedy.)

Just 2 minutes later, the fire spread to the Cabaret Room. People panicked, pushing and shoving toward exit doors. Flames spread throughout the room and to other parts of the building so quickly, many never stood a chance at evacuating. Many bodies were found piled up near the main entrance.

Firefighters attacked the Cabaret Room, but the roof collapsed at midnight, dashing any hope that victims might still be found alive.

### Critical Issues

The Beverly Hills Supper Club Fire is considered one of the most significant fires in fire service history. While this incident has provided countless lessons in the areas of pre-fire planning, code enforcement, mandated company-level inspections, hardwired fire protection systems and advocacy for fire sprinklers, very few have considered the tactical lessons of this historic fire.

Some of the more critical issues to consider include:

- **High-occupancy/high-hazard facilities:** At the time of this incident, more than 1,000 patrons were inside this maze-like facility (multiple remodels, add-ons, etc.). What actions would you take to ensure an orderly evacuation? How would you account for more than 1,000 patrons? What type of search and rescue operations would you employ and how many firefighters would be needed to accomplish the task?

May 27, 2007, *The Courier-Journal*—

Courtesy-<http://www.firefighternation.com/profiles/blogs/recalling-one-of-americas>

- **Maze-like atmospheres** have traditionally created an increased risk for firefighters. What precautions would you employ to prevent your firefighters from becoming disoriented? What role would air management play in your deployment efforts?
- **Confirmed life hazards/large-scale fire (risk a lot to save a lot):** With a known life hazard (several hundred confirmed to be trapped in the Cabaret Room), how would you attack this fire? What size line(s) would you deploy and where would you position them to prevent additional loss of life?
- **The club was positioned remotely on a hill protected by one on-site fire hydrant and a small pond with limited access.** What strategies do you have in place to establish high-volume water supplies to remote locations within your district (cul de sacs, remote rural roads, large-scale setbacks, etc.)?
- **How would apparatus positioning be affected by your efforts to establish an effective water supply (limited access, one way in/out)?**
- **Mass-casualty incidents:** This incident claimed the lives of 165 individuals and injured several hundred more. What plans do you have in place for a temporary morgue? Do you have up-to-date MCI plans with your hospitals and have you conducted full-scale drills to validate their effectiveness?

The Beverly Hills Supper Club is a fire I will always remember, and it's a fire that everyone in the fire service should take the time to review. The lessons are many, but only those who take the time to review all aspects will truly understand the complexities of that fateful night.

For more insight into this incident, check out the newly released book, [Inside the Beverly Hills Supper Club Fire](#).

## Southgate, KY Nightclub Fire Disaster, May 1977

Posted October 22nd, 2007 by Stu Beitler

### OVER 160 VICTIMS DIE IN SUPPER CLUB FIRE

Southgate, Ky. (UPI) -- Medical examiners today tried to piece together bone fragments and recovery crews dug through the charred, muddy debris of the Beverly Hills Supper Club for more victims of a raging fire which killed at least 160 persons during a holiday weekend stage show. Pieces of bones and skulls of 33 more victims were recovered Sunday from the ruins of the sprawling "Showplace of the Midwest," which Saturday night turned into a blazing inferno -- the worst fire in America in 35 years.

The club was packed for a performance by singer JOHN DAVIDSON. Officials said about four more hours of work to remove collapsed roofing and steel girders remained before a final toll would be known. Workers were forced to halt the search at 6 p. m. Sunday because of a driving rainstorm.

Authorities had said earlier that they feared the death toll could reach 400, but Southgate Fire Chief DAVID RIESENBERG said, "I'm optimistic we won't find any more bodies." He said the area of the ruins where the search for bodies is now confined was not one of the worst hit by the fire. "We have found bits and pieces of bodies burned to a crisp, an arm here, a leg there, but mostly just skulls with everything burned from them," a volunteer worker said Sunday.

DR. FRED STINE, Campbell County coroner said 22 of the bodies are "badly charred" and that it may be three days before identifications are complete.

"Some don't even have heads, so that makes it difficult for dental identification," STINE said. He said the bodies were being embalmed in the basement of a makeshift morgue in an armory in nearby Ft. Thomas. About 3,500 persons jammed the supper club Saturday night, about 1,100 of them in the plush Cabaret Room to hear singer JOHN DAVIDSON when smoke began pouring into the room. Within minutes flames shot through the dense smoke. Screams of horror when the lights failed helped trigger general panic which authorities said caused the high death toll.

Bodies were stacked three and four deep in doorways.

DAVIDSON'S road manager, DON PETERSON, said the singer had just stepped out of a shower when club employes warned them about the fire. "He immediately jumped into some clothes and ran out the back door and held the door and dragged people out of the room through the stage door," PETERSON said. But DAVIDSON'S pianist-conductor DOUG HERRO, died in the blaze.

"I just can't ... I don't want to talk about it," DAVIDSON said Sunday as he waited for a plane at the Greater Cincinnati Airport to fly home to Los Angeles.

The comedy team of JIM TEETER and JIM McDONALD, actually on stage when the fire broke out, was credited with saving many lives by staying on stage and keeping the crowd as calm as possible before patrons bolted for the exits. They made their way to safety.

STINE said he understood the fire started in an oil generator underneath the Zebra Room, another party room in the club.

"When they tried to put it out with a fire extinguisher, it blew flames down the hallway to the Cabaret Room," he said.

It was the worst fire in the United States since 1942 when 491 persons were killed in a fire at the Coconut Grove in Boston. In 1944, a circus tent fire in Hartford, Conn., killed 168.

Kentucky Deputy Fire Marshal TOM WALD said the Beverly Hills Supper Club, which headlined such performers as FRANK SINATRA and DEAN MARTIN, did not have a sprinkler system, but was not required to have one.

#### PANICKED CROWD PILES UP IN DOORWAYS

Southgate, Ky. (UPI) -- "They panicked. That about covers it," said Kentucky Deputy State Fire Marshal TOM WALD. "They lost their cool, to put it in the vernacular."

That was the reason, WALD said Sunday, for the high death toll in the fire at the Beverly Hills Supper Club.

When the blaze broke out, a capacity Saturday night holiday crowd of about 3,500 packed the huge club to hear singer JOHN DAVIDSON. "The crowd panicked and a lot of them stacked up in the doorways," WALD said. "You think you will try and stay calm in that kind of situation, but when it happens, it apparently is very easy to panic."

"From what I've been able to piece together, all the night club personnel tried to keep the crowd calm," he said. "But, as soon as smoke started rolling in pretty good, they bolted and headed for the exits. Smoke apparently panics people."

Southgate Fire Chief DAVID RIESENBERG said, "Apparently the people got confused."

"Obviously they panicked," he said. "The place was loaded with smoke and flames and the people couldn't find the exit."

JIM SCHWORER, Beverly Hills public relations man, said the fire knocked out the electrical system, which contributed to the hysteria.

"It was apparently dark in there and that was a key factor," said SCHWORER. "People couldn't see what they were doing and the smoke poured in."

One person in the club at the time of the fire, RICHARD SCHAFTLEIN, 32, Louisville, Ky., said the comedy team of JIM TEETER and JIM McDONALD was on stage when the fire broke out and helped keep the crowd calm.

"They were great the way they were just telling jokes," said SCHAFTLEIN, who along with his wife brother and sister-in-law escaped the fire uninjured. "I consider those comedians real heroes. I credit them with saving lots of lives including my own."

"People walked out very casual," he said. "The two comics were terrific, saying things like 'we've had a lot of people walk out on us, but this is ridiculous.'"

WALD said an arson team had been called in, but to his knowledge "it was not arson. I assume it was accidental."

"I don't like what has happened here but after 23 years in the fire business I can believe it," he said. "Still, to a lot of people, it doesn't seem possible it can happen here."

#### MORGUE IN GYMNASIUM FOR STRONG-STOMACHED

Ft. Thomas, Ky. (UPI) -- Volunteer rescue workers were warned that only those with strong stomachs should enter the sheet-draped gymnasium of the Fort Thomas armory.

The gym was converted into a morgue after the deadly fire at the Beverly Hills Supper Club in nearby Southgate.

Rows of white sheeted bodies and green bags bearing charred bone fragments -- there were 160 victims in all by late Sunday ... covered the gym floor.

The first bodies brought in Saturday night from the "Showplace of the Midwest" were mostly smoke inhalation victims. They were clad in suits and evening dresses, relatively unmarked by the fire.

But Sunday, as workers plowed through the ruins with blow torches, bulldozers and a 100-foot crane, the victims dug out of the ruins were described as "mostly skulls, charred arms and legs."

Packed in green bags on huge National Guard trucks, the remains were taken to the armory where FBI identification specialists and medical examiners tried to match names with bodies.

The searched wallets, took fingerprints and scoured dental charts. Campbell County Coroner DR. FRED STINE said, however, that even those methods wouldn't work in some cases. Bodies were coming in without heads and minus limbs.

White sheets strung on clothelines around the gym floor kept the curious from seeing the bodies. Volunteers who helped bring the dead to the armory were told "don't go in unless you have a strong stomach."

Relatives had to go in.

Slowly, as doctors, named, then cleaned the bodies, they were released, one-by-one, to grieving families.

"It is sickening," said Kentucky State Police Lt. BEN HARNEY, who helped in the body detail.



# October 27, 2007, Ancestry.com

Daily Middlesboro News Kentucky 1977-05-30

List of 165 Dead in Beverly Hills Supper Club Fire May 28, 1977  
From a "Special Edition of the Cincinnati Enquirer on May 28, 1997"

MARIAN ADKINS, 62, Ashland, Ky.  
AMELIA ARTHUR, 65, Covington, Ky.  
WILLIAM EGAR ARTHUR, 53, Covington, Ky.  
RUTH K. BACKUS, 49, Ohio.  
WALTER WM. BACKUS, JR., 50, Ohio.  
JEAN I. BAKER, 52, Kettering, Ohio.  
WARREN BAKER, 54, Kettering, Ohio.  
DAN BARKER, 29, Southgate, Ky.  
MABLE MARIE BARKER, 54, Trenton, Ohio.  
MARTIN HERSCHEL BARKER, 60, Trenton, Ohio.  
JOHN B. BEAVERS, 28, Grove City, Ohio.  
ANN LOUISE BEER, 23, Hamilton, Ohio.  
DONALD BEZOLD, 54, Alexandria, Ky.  
PATRICIA MATILDA BEZOLD, 30, Alexandria, Ky.  
BARBARA ANN BOHRER, 23, Ohio.  
JANE LOUISE BOHRER, 16, Cincinnati, Ohio.  
JUDITH ANN BOHRER, 28, Cincinnati, Ohio.  
MARY LOUISE BOHRER, 56, Cincinnati, Ohio.  
RAYMOND WILLARD BOHRER, 56, Cincinnati, Ohio.  
THOMAS WILLIAM BOHRER, 25, Cincinnati, Ohio.  
DORIS JEAN BROWN, 44, Kettering, Ohio.  
JAMES K. BROWN, 46, Lexington, Ky.  
PATRICIA BROWN, 40, Lexington, Ky.  
CHARLOTTE FIDLER BURNS, 58, Ashland, Ky.  
ROBERT DONALDSON BURNS, 60, Ashland, Ky.  
MAXIE HOLLAN BUTLER, 56, Ashland, Ky.  
ROY O. BUTLER, 49, Ashland, Ky.  
HOWARD B. CARSON, 69, Covington, Ky.  
JOSEPHINE CARSON, 65, Covington, Ky.  
HELEN MARGARET CASTELLI, 53, Crittenden, Ky.  
NORBERT J. CASTELLI, 55, Crittenden, Ky.  
STUART PATRICK COAKLEY, 36, Ludlow, Ky.  
GERALDINE COLE, 22, Jeffersonville, Ky.  
ELLEN HEARNE COOKSEY, 58, Ashland, Ky.  
FRED MILLER COOKSEY, 61, Ashland, Ky.  
CAROL ANN COTTONGIM, 32, Hamilton, Ohio.  
ROBERT DOUGLAS COLLONGIM, 34, Hamilton, Ohio.  
ORVILLE COULTER, 68, Ironton, Ohio.  
JAMES CARL COX, 59, Florence, Ky.  
JAMES BRENT CRANE, 19, Waynesville, Ohio.  
HAROLD ALAN DALY, 32, Washington Court House, Ohio.  
ROSE MARY DISCHER, 38, Highland Heights, Ky.  
GLORIA SUE DUNCIL, 36, Hamilton, Ohio.  
MARY NELL DWYER, 25, Lexington, Ky.  
ROSEMARY MULHOLLAND DWYER, 56, Lexington, Ky.  
SHELIA A. DWYER, 23, Lexington, Ky.  
ELMER LEE ELLISON, 60, Covington, Ky.  
NORA LEE ELLISON, 38, Covington, Ky.  
GRACE LOUISE FALL, 48, Jacksonburg, Ohio.  
WILLIAM LEWIS FAWBUSH, SR., 70, Pewee Valley, Ky.  
MARILYN L. FINCH, 41, Elsmere, Ky.  
VIRGINIA LEE JONES FINCH, 62, Ashland, Ky.  
HELEN WRIGHT FLOYD, 62, Pellefonte, Ky.  
JAMES E. FOWLER, 57, Ironton, Ohio.  
ANNA MYRTLE FRESHNER, 61, New Lebanon, Ohio.  
FREDRICA HEHR FRYMAN, 40, Cynthiana, Ky.  
MARTIN SCOTT FRYMAN, 14, Cynthiana, Ky.  
TRACY OWEN FRYMAN, 16, Cynthiana, Ky.  
WILLARD T. FRYMAN, 40, Cynthiana, Ky.  
LENORA HILL GENTRY, 30, Cincinnati, Ohio.  
MARY ANN COLEMAN GORHAM, 46, Lexington, Ky.  
RICHARD ALLEN GORHAM, 48, Lexington, Ky.  
RUSSELL OSCAR GRAY, 22, Cincinnati, Ohio.  
CAROL ANN GREER, 31, Florence, Ky.  
FRANKIE MCKINLEY GREER, 33, Florence, Ky.  
CLARENCE F. GRIPSHOVER, 48, Covington, Ky.  
DONNIE CLYDE GROGAN, 50, Murray, Ky.  
FELTON BIRDSONG HARRISON, 73, Oakwood, Ohio.  
DOUGLAS G. HERRO, 27, Canogo Park, Calif.  
HARRY RICHARD HODGES II, 27, Columbus, Ohio.  
BARBARA J. HOUS, 51, Madison Township, Ohio.  
DOTTIE D. ISAACS, 67, Dayton, Ohio.  
MARY LOUISE ITTEL, 58, Hamilton, Ohio.  
RUTH JONES JOHN, 59, Ashland, Ky.

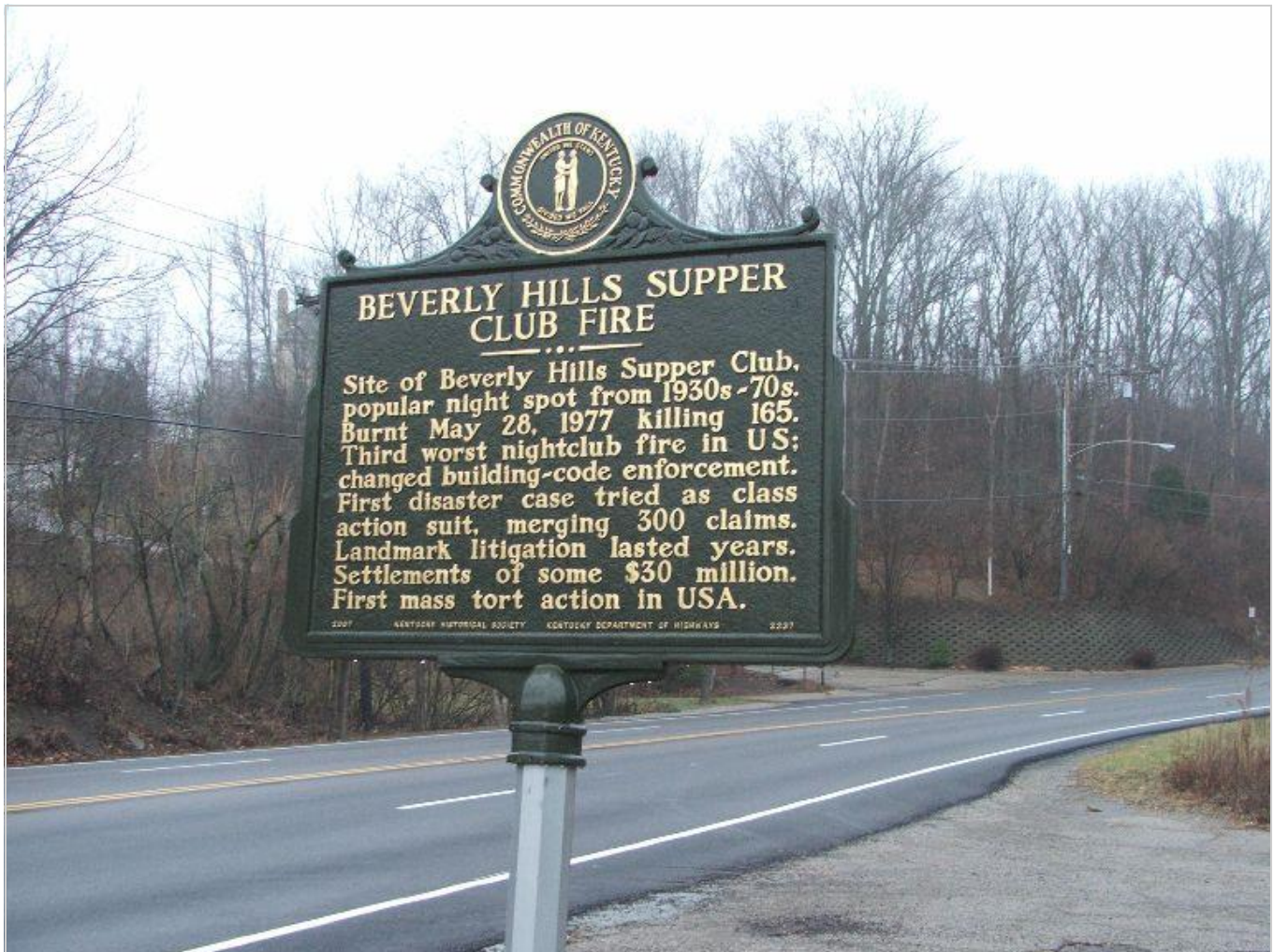
LILLIAN ROETTGER JUTZI, 58, Dayton, Ohio.  
RAYMOND CLARENCE JUTZI, 67, Dayton, Ohio.  
ROBERT E. KETTMAN, 34, Withamsville, Ohio.  
SUSAN A. KETTMAN, 35, Withamsville, Ohio.  
TAMMY KINCER, 18, Lebanon, Ohio.  
LUCY MAE KING, 57, Hamilton, Ohio.  
PAUL G. KISER, 54, Murfreesboro, Tenn.  
MINNIE J. KNIGHT, 70, Germantown, Ohio.  
DONALD EUGENE KOONTZ, 48, Hamilton, Ohio.  
DOROTHY MAXINE KOONTZ, 46, Hamilton, Ohio.  
CARL KRIGBAUM, JR., 55, Louisville, Ky.  
DIANE L. LAPE, 25, Cincinnati, Ohio.  
ETTA E. LEIS, 70, Miamisburg, Ohio.  
GARY LEE LITRELL, 29, Lawrenceburg, Ind.  
SHARON LITRELL, 26, Lawrenceburg, Ind.  
LEONA S. LONG, 72, Dayton, Ohio.  
JAMES P. LYON, 42, Ft. Mitchell, Ky.  
MONICA A. LYON, 42, Ft. Mitchell, Ky.  
MARGARET ELIZABETH MALOWAN, 54, Dayton, Ohio.  
SHARLENE MATTHEWS, 27, Cincinnati, Ohio.  
HERMAN CLARK MAYFIELD, 35, Jacksonville, Ala.  
SARAH McCLAIN, 73, Miamisburg, Ohio.  
COLLIS WILLIAM MITCHELL, 50, Wayne Township, Ohio.  
MINDA MARIE MOFORD, 16, Dover, Ky.  
AGNES IRENE MUDDIMAN, 48, Cheviot, Ohio.  
EVERETT H. NEILL, JR., 27, Ft. Mitchell, Ky.  
PAULA LYNEE NEILL, 23, Ft. Mitchell, Ky.  
JEAN NOE, 28, Taylor Mill, Ky.  
MILDRED F. OVERTON, 62, Huntington, W. Va.  
RUTH PATTERSON, 67, Coal Grove, Ohio.  
HAROLD R. PENWELL, JR., 28, Wayne Township, Ohio.  
HILMA C. PFEIFFER, 64, Dayton, Ohio.  
LAWRENCE G. PHELPS, 44, Lakeside Park, Ky.  
MARGARET ELIZABETH PHILLIPS, 65, Dayton, Ohio.  
ALBERTA CATHERINE PIEPER, 49, Louisville, Ky.  
MARY L. PITSENBARGER, Greenville, Ohio.  
NOLAN E. PITSENBARGER, 62, Greenville, Ohio.  
RICHARD KARL POKKY, 23, Cincinnati, Ohio.  
DOROTHY POLLEY, 72, Ironton, Ohio.  
GEORGE CHARLES POLLEY, 74, Ironton, Ohio.  
ETHEL PRUGH, 55, West Carrollton, Ohio.  
GARY M. PRUGH, 30, Washington Township, Ohio.  
L. J. PRUGH, 56, West Carrollton, Ohio.  
VIRGINIA L. RAITT, 34, West Chester, Ohio.  
VIRGINIA K. RAMLER, 52, Erlanger, Ky.  
ANNA LEE REINICKE, 59, Kettering, Ohio.  
NELL REYNOLDS, 71, Louisville, Ky.  
ELMA B. RHINEHART, 74, Lewisburg, Ohio.  
CHARLES JOE RIST, 59, Catlettsburg, Ky.  
MAYMIE LOUISE RIST, 57, Catlettsburg, Ky.  
ROBERT R. RODEN, 58, Taylor Mill, Ky.  
TERRIE LYNN ROSE, 26, Deer Park, Ohio. (Waitress at Club)  
ALMA SCHNAPP, 67, Miamisburg, Ohio.  
JOSEPH JOHN SCHRANTZ, 63, Green Township, Ohio.  
MARY AGNES SCHRANTZ, 61, Green Township, Ohio.  
ROSALIE SCHUMAN, 33, Lawrenceburg, Ind.  
ROBERT GLENN SEAMAN, 57, Erlanger, Ky.  
PERCY M. SHEPHERD, 64, Cincinnati, Ohio.  
CHARLES D. SHERWOOD, 54, Dayton, Ohio.  
EVELYN MAE SHOUGH, 61, Kettering, Ohio.  
DONNA S. SKAGGS, 22, Louisville, Ky.  
PAUL HERMAN SMITH, 54, Cincinnati, Ohio.  
ANN LIGHT STALLONS, 44, Murray, Ky.  
OPAL LUCILLE STEWART, 57, Harrison Township, Ohio.  
FRED KOLBY STRATTON, 37, Norwood, Ohio.  
JOHN R. STROM, 52, Lexington, Ky.  
LORA JANE SYKES, 29, Bright, Ind.  
ROBERT EARL SYKES, 29, Bright, Ind.  
STEVEN HOWARD TAYLOR, 26, Cincinnati, Ohio. (waiter at club)  
BARBARA A. THORNHILL, 35, Delhi Township, Ohio.  
CAROLYN LOUISE THORNHILL, 35, Miami Township, Ohio.  
DARLENE E. THORNHILL, 18, Delhi Township, Ohio.  
ROBERT H. THORNHILL, 36, Delhi Township, Ohio.  
ROSEMARY TILLEY, 33, Kettering, Ohio.  
GLENN NEOMI TURNER, 63, Spring Valley, Ohio.  
JOHN L. TWADDELL, 52, Fort Wright, Ky.  
DIANA LOU TYRA, 19, Louisville, Ky.  
DORIS L. TYRA, 46, Louisville, Ky.

PHYLLIS A. TYRA, 24, Louisville, Ky.  
MARY SUSAN VOGEL, 29, Cincinnati, Ohio.  
OTILIA MARGARET VOLLMAN, 84, Newport, Ky.  
FRED E. WADE, 61, Wayne Township, Ohio.  
MARTHA ELINOR WADE, 61, Wayne Township, Ohio.  
GEORGE R. WALKER, JR., 32, Louisville, Ky.  
BEATRICE E. WENNING, 57, Dayton, Ohio.  
GERTRUDE MARY WILLIAMS, 67, Miami Township, Ohio.  
BETTY WILSON, 62, Miamisburg, Ohio.  
MARY ANN WORK, 29, Covington, Ohio.  
ROBERT FRED ZADEK, 39, Miami Township, Ohio.  
GEORGE ZORICK, JR., 52, Cheviot, Ohio.  
GEORGE ZORICK III, 32, Mack, Ohio.

Source Kentucky and Ohio death certificates.

Today

Courtesy <http://www.waymarking.com/gallery/image.aspx?f=1&guid=40677687-aa09-4935-97e6-11e26b3680ca>



Today

Courtesy Google:



Courtesy, *The Courier-Journal*, May 27, 2007:



Former Beverly Hills Supper Club employees Wayne Dammert, left, and David Brock survived the May 28, 1977, fire. Atop the hill where the club sat in Southgate, Ky., Dammert has erected a 25-foot cross. "This is where the people died," he said. (By David R. Lutman, Special to *The Courier-Journal*)

2007

Courtesy <http://nky.cincinnati.com/apps/pbcs.dll/gallery?>

Avis=AB&Dato=20070524&Kategori=NEWS0103&Lopenr=705240802&Ref=PH

Rick Dammert throws up a line to help secure the 25-foot cross that he and others put up at the site of the Beverly Hills Supper Club in Southgate, Ky., on April 21, 2007. His father, Wayne, was working as a manager at the club on May 28, 1977. A fire that night killed 165 people.



2007

Courtesy <http://nky.cincinnati.com/apps/pbcs.dll/gallery?>

Avis=AB&Dato=20070524&Kategori=NEWS0103&Lopenr=705240802&Ref=PH

Rick Dammert throws up a line to help secure the 25-foot cross that he and others put up at the site of the Beverly Hills Supper Club in Southgate, Ky., on April 21, 2007. His father, Wayne, was working as a manager at the club on May 28, 1977. A fire that night killed 165 people.



2011

Courtesy <http://nky.cincinnati.com/apps/pbcs.dll/gallery?>

Avis=AB&Dato=20070525&Kategori=NEWS0103&Lopenr=705250808&Ref=PH



1971 file photo of The Viennese Room at the Beverly Hills Supper Club



Firefighters removing bodies after the Beverly Hills Supper Club fire, May 1977.

Aerial view of the aftermath of the Beverly Hills Supper Club fire - May 1977.



2011

Courtesy <http://nky.cincinnati.com/apps/pbcs.dll/gallery?>

Avis=AB&Dato=20070525&Kategori=NEWS0103&Lopenr=705250808&Ref=PH



Firefighters remove a body from the rubble of the Beverly Hills Supper Club fire.



Rescue teams bringing out the last of the bodies from the Beverly Hills Supper Club fire - May, 1977



Workers sifting through rubble after the Beverly Hills Supper Club fire - May, 1977.



Tom Laver of the Southgate Volunteer Fire Department rests after searching through the rubble of the the Beverly Hills Supper Club fire - May 1977



Firefighters at the Beverly Hills Supper Club fire - May 1977

2011

Courtesy <http://nky.cincinnati.com/apps/pbcs.dll/gallery?>

Avis=AB&Dato=20070525&Kategori=NEWS0103&Lopenr=705250808&Ref=PH



**Kentucky Gov. Julian Carroll at the scene of the Beverly Hills Supper Club fire - May 1977**



**Bodies lined up in the armory in Fort Thomas that served as a makeshift morgue after the Beverly Hills Supper Club fire - May, 1977.**



**Southgate assistant fire chief John Payne inspecting the aftermath of the Beverly Hills Supper Club fire - June 1, 1977**



**Father Ed Murray, left, and an unidentified man, right, escorting James Dwyer of Lexington from the temporary morgue in the Fort Thomas armory. Dwyer's mother and two sisters were killed in the Beverly Hills Supper Club fire - May, 1977**



2011

Courtesy <http://nky.cincinnati.com/apps/pbcs.dll/gallery?>

Avis=AB&Dato=20070525&Kategori=NEWS0103&Lopenr=705250808&Ref=PH



An FBI special fingerprint team from Washington checking fingerprints to identify bodies from the Beverly Hills Supper Club fire - May, 1977.



One of the many funerals of Beverly Hills Supper Club victims - May, 1977



Press conference with Campbell County Coroner Dr. Fred Stine outside the Ft. Thomas Armory after the Beverly Hills Supper Club fire, May, 1977



John Davidson attends the funeral of his music director Douglas G. Herro, who was killed at the Beverly Hills Supper Club fire - June, 1977.

2011

Courtesy <http://nky.cincinnati.com/apps/pbcs.dll/gallery?>

Avis=AB&Dato=20070525&Kategori=NEWS0103&Lopenr=705250808&Ref=PH



An aerial view of the Beverly Hills Supper Club reveals unclaimed cars and the gutted building - May, 1977.



The interior of the Beverly Hills Supper Club after the fire.

The 1977 sale of items salvaged from the Beverly Hills Supper Club after the fire.

Today

Courtesy <http://www.waymarking.com/gallery/default.aspx?f=1&guid=a9b80ccd-d487-443b-bd64-27a3c06d3282&gid=2>



At one time there was a small grotto here. This is what remains.



Anderson Township Firefighter's Memorial





## Busboy: Beverly Hills fire was arson

Written by

William Croyle

12:49 PM, May. 29, 2011

**SOUTHGATE** - Dave Brock led a group of people up a broken driveway Saturday toward the top of the hill where the Beverly Hills Supper Club once stood.

They didn't get far when a couple of Highland Heights/Southgate police officers pulled up from behind and warned them they were trespassing.

Brock politely obeyed and led the group back down the hill.

"I respect what they have to do," Brock said of the officers. "I think it's horrible, but I understand the law."

Saturday marked the 34th anniversary of the fire that raged through the club, killing 165 people. Though unhappy that people still cannot have legal access to the site to pay their respects, especially those directly affected by that fateful night, Brock is fighting a much larger battle: exposing what he believes is the truth of what really happened May 28, 1977.

- **Photos: Former employees erect memorial in 2007**  
Brock had been a busboy at the club for

five years, and was working the night it burned down.

To this day, he and a handful of others contend the fire was arson, not the cause of faulty aluminum wiring in the walls, as the state concluded in its investigation back then. He says the fire started in the basement in an air-handling system, which he says was rigged to spark the blaze.

Gov. Steve Beshear assembled a panel in 2008 to review evidence gathered by Brock, but the panel concluded in 2009 that there wasn't enough to prove it was arson.

Brock took his story to local author and historian Bob Webster, asking him if he'd write a book about it.

"I told him that I wasn't interested in writing his story, but that I would listen and research what he told me," Webster said.

Webster, who never had a reason to dispute the state's conclusion, said he was



Zoom

Scott Gilbreath was only 13 at the time of the fire, but he has maintained a makeshift memorial since 2007. / The Enquirer/Tony Jones

Today

Courtesy <http://nky.cincinnati.com/article/AB/20110528/NEWS0103/105290334/Busboy-Beverly-Hills-fire-arson?odyssey=tab%7Ctopnews%7Ctext%7CKentucky%20Legislature>

**nky.com**

shocked at the evidence Brock presented, including photographs and thousands of pages of documentation.

"I still cannot prove exactly who did it or exactly why, but I clearly see enough evidence that it was not faulty wiring," Webster said while standing at the bottom of the hill Saturday. "The evidence shows there were people here that day that shouldn't have been here. I feel the book will clearly show the fire was intentionally set."

The book, tentatively titled "The Beverly Hills Supper Club Fire," is expected to be published in time for next year's 35th anniversary.

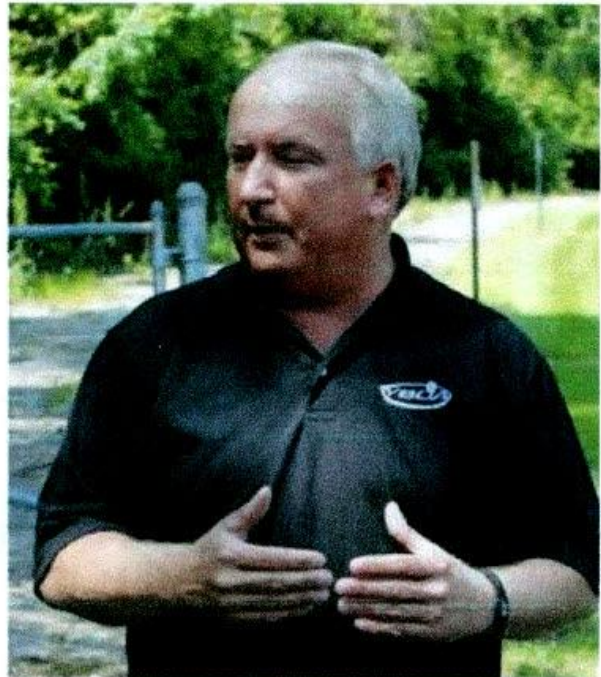
While a large memorial on the site, erected and cared for mainly by former club employee Wayne Dammert, can be seen from Interstate 471, people cannot legally go up there. The land is owned today by Life Enriching Communities, which bought the site 10 years ago, but has yet to develop it.

The only visible memorials are a landmark sign on U.S. 27, along with some flowers, wreaths and small statues at the base of the driveway.

Webster has interviewed countless people who lost relatives and friends in the fire, and said many of them still want a memorial on the hill they can visit.

"When you talk to these people - grandmas and grandpas, mothers and fathers, baby sitters, kids - you realize you can't just put

this away," Webster said. "These people want a place to go."



Zoom

David Brock stands in front of the closed gate and the road leading to the former site of the Beverly Hills Supper Club. / The Enquirer/Tony Jones

July 13, 2011, Courtesy WLWT.com:

## WLWT.com

**Survivor: Photos May Prove Beverly Hills Arson Theory**

### ***Former Busboy Says Fatal Fire Intentionally Set***

POSTED: 5:54 pm EDT July 13, 2011

UPDATED: 6:37 pm EDT July 13, 2011

**SOUTHGATE, Ky.** -- It's been more than 30 years since 165 were killed in the Beverly Hills Supper Club fire that was later ruled accidental.

But new evidence is leading to a renewed push to reopen the investigation.

In the days after the May 1977 fire at the Southgate attraction, a Kentucky crime lab technician named Ronnie Freel took hundreds of photographs at the scene.

Most of those photographs have never been seen and were stored in Freel's garage, but the Kentucky attorney general's office has ordered him to turn over the photographs to be made publicly available.

"We're going to have access to well over 500 photos that no one has ever seen," said David Brock, who was working as a busboy the night of the fire.

Brock believes the fire was intentionally set, and he has been urging officials for years to reopen their investigation.

He believes the photos may show evidence of arson and support his theory that a breaker box was tampered with beneath the club's Zebra Room.

Freel must turn over the photos to the state by next month.

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