

Victory Village Residents:

Do You And Your Family Live In A Fire Trap?

THIS PAGE BY
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Many Blazes—None Serious

We've Been Lucky So Far

Shortly before 12:30 p.m. March 28, 1956, 40 young children were playing games in the Victory Village Day Care and Community Center on Mason Farm Road.

They whiled away the cold winter afternoon while Daddy was attending classes at the University and Momma was working at her job in town.

All seemed peaceful and safe. Then, suddenly, someone noticed a fire leaping up from the building's heating unit.

Within 30 minutes, most of the contents of the building were burned black and unrecognizable. The frame of the wooden, clapboard structure stood empty, like a hollow skull.

Luckily, every one of the forty children reached safety with the help of the Center's staff members, who had the presence of mind to evacuate the building immediately after the fire was discovered.

SPREAD QUICKLY
The blaze spread quickly along the thin walls of the structure and devoured part of the roof. Firemen and student volunteers rushed to the scene and battled the fire for 20 minutes before bringing it under control.

The fire is known to have stemmed from the automatic oil-fired furnace which heated the room where the children played. Some oil had leaked from lead-in pipes and had been ignited by the head from the stove.

It was the second fire in the building in two years. Officials learned a lesson from it and, when the Center was rebuilt shortly after the fire, the heating unit was housed in an entirely separate building.

This is just one of many close calls that have threatened residents of the Village over the years. Miraculously, no reported injuries by fire are on record.

Faulty wiring caused a fire which burnt out one of the apartments on Polk St. in 1964. Mrs. Raymond J. Brown of the Victory Village Rental Office remembers that fire as "the biggest we've had."

"We've been pretty lucky, so far," she said.

Just two weeks ago a small fire erupted from a kerosene heating unit in an apartment on Daniels Rd. Firemen arrived in time to keep it under control.

Every year, according to Capt. Everette Lloyd of the Chapel Hill Fire Department, a number of minor fires disturb the peace of Victory Village. The blame for these fires can usually be traced to negligence or carelessness, said Capt. Everette.

James Wadsworth, University Director of Housing, said "I want to congratulate the people who live in this section of the campus. It is a real tribute to them that we have had

as few fires as we have," he said.

GOOD RECORD
"I believe the people out there to be concerned and alert about the danger of fire. Occasionally something can go wrong with a piece of heating equipment and a fire can start," said Wadsworth, "but our record is remarkable."

Wadsworth said that Village residents should promote safety among themselves. "There's room for improvement," he said, "despite our record."

John H. Hinson, Manager of the Victory Village Rental Office, said that Village apartments "aren't dangerous if a certain amount of care is taken."

He stressed the need for each family to have an escape plan in case fire should threaten a building. "The main thing is to get everybody out of the place and away from the fire," he said. "We would rather lose a building than a life any day."

"We're not worried too much about those shacks out there. It's the lives of the people we are trying to save," said Capt. Everette Lloyd of the Chapel Hill Fire Department.

The residents of the section of the University's married student housing known as "Victory Village" may wince at having their homes referred to as "those shacks," but they cannot help but echo Capt. Lloyd's sentiments about the danger of fire there.

Because of the prefabricated construction of the houses and barracks in the Village, the terms "cardboard city" and "matchbox village" have stuck in the local vernacular as descriptions of the area.

These labels are absurd, but they do show signs of a situation that should be of vital concern to every resident of the complex. That is this: Because the buildings are old and shabbily constructed, there is a constant danger of fire there.

Five hundred and fifty-two families occupy the area, including a total of over 1000 small children.

It is of no use to suggest that the University get rid of the substandard housing in the Village altogether. Officials have had that in mind almost before the guns were cool after World War II.

TEMPORARY HOMES
The Village was constructed hurriedly in 1946 as temporary housing for the families of GI's returning to school at government expense after helping to win the Allied victory. The General Assembly intended to replace the temporary structures with permanent housing as soon as it could afford it.

The legislature finally built sound, fireproof apartments in Odum Village a few blocks east of Victory Village. By that time, however, the number of married students had already made the new facilities obsolete. So, Victory Village still stands.

As the buildings grow older, the danger of fire grows greater.

"Those places will burn pretty quickly, especially the contents," said Capt. Lloyd. "The kerosene space heaters that are used to heat the apartments should be handled with extreme caution. We answer several calls over there each year for people who have misused their stoves."

"Now that people are starting to turn their heating systems back on," said Lloyd. "I want to warn them to have all their heating equipment checked before they use it. Most fires in the Village are caused by those kerosene stoves."

Lloyd encourages everyone to develop and practice a fixed plan of escape.

Mrs. Raymond J. Brown, of the Victory Village rental office reports that there are no fire alarm boxes anywhere in the area. "Anyone who has a fire should call the Chapel Hill Fire Department on the telephone right away," she said.

"For small fires, each apartment is equipped with a hand fire extinguisher," she said.

Mrs. Brown listed the main causes of fire in the Village as follows: (1) Misuse of heating facilities, (2) Overloading electrical circuits and misuse of extension cords (3) Grease fires from cooking and (4) Misuse of decorative lights at Christmas.

These causes are responsible for a half - dozen or so minor fires each year in Victory Village.

"The biggest fire we've had in an apartment was caused by an overloaded electrical outlet," said Mrs. Brown. She said fires have resulted from worn electrical cords placed under rugs.

"We've never had a fire start from a faulty heater," Mrs. Brown said. "And we've never had one start from smoking in bed."

But Mrs. Brown admits that Village residents have been extremely lucky.

Last year in the United States fires took 12,000 lives and caused property losses totaling over \$1.4 billion. More than 1,000 home fires blazed each day. More than half the total fatalities — 6,500 lives — were lost in home fires and more than one-third of those who died were children.

Three out of four of these fires were caused by carelessness according to the American Insurance Association. They need not have happened.



DANGER—Three-year-old Lawson Barber, herself a resident of Victory Village, demonstrates the way to use the kerosene space heaters in Village Apartments. The main thing to do, she says is be careful! Heaters such as these are the main threat to fire safety in the Village according to the University Rental

Office. They should be handled with care. Servicemen are always available at the Village maintenance office to assist tenants in using the stoves. Lawson is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. William Barber of 103 Daniels Road.

—DTH Photo by Mike McGowan

How Can You Prevent Fire From Periling Your Home?

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Nearly every potential fire, in Victory Village or anywhere else, could be prevented if people took the time and effort to be safe.

A little forethought and common sense now can spare your family the heartache of a fire later.

Now that the cold season is approaching and heating units are being put back to work, the danger of fire is greater than ever.

The following checklist of fire hazards is approved by Capt. Everette Lloyd of the Chapel Hill Fire Department and the American Insurance Association. Inspect your apartment now. Every NO answer below means potential danger for you.

SMOKING HAZARDS

—Do you keep matches away from sources of heat such as stoves or heaters?

—Do you make sure matches and smoking materials are out before disposing of them?

—Do you have plenty of large, non-combustible ash trays in every room?

—Is "no smoking in bed" a rule in your home?

ELECTRICAL HAZARDS

—Do you allow only University approved electricians to install or work on your wiring?

—Are there enough electrical outlets in every room to avoid the need for multiple attachment plugs and long extension cords?

—Are all extension cords in the open — not run under rugs, over hooks or through partitions or door openings?

HOUSEKEEPING HAZARDS

—Do you keep closets cleared of old rags, papers, mattresses, broken furniture and other combustible odds and ends?

—If you store paint, varnish, etc., do you keep the containers tightly closed?

—Has everyone in your family been warned never to use

and placed out of the way of traffic?

SPECIAL FOR PARENTS

—Do you keep matches out of the reach of children?

—Do you leave a responsible person with your children when you go out, even for a short while?

—When you employ baby sitters, do you instruct them carefully on what to do in case of fire?

gasoline, benzine or other flammable fluids for cleaning clothes, furnishings or floors?

HEATING AND COOKING HAZARDS:

—Before the heating season begins, do you have your heating system inspected and serviced?

Are all flue pipes, vent connectors, gas vents and chimneys inspected each fall, cleaned and repaired as necessary

—Is your stove, including broiler, kept clean of grease?

—Are curtains near stoves and heating equipment arranged so as not to blow over them?

—Are all heaters set level

IN CASE OF FIRE

—Do members of the family know how to turn in a fire alarm?

—Do members of the family know the telephone number of the fire department; how to report a fire properly?

—Have you worked out a plan of escape from every room in your home, especially from the bedrooms?

—Have you practiced that escape plan by holding fire drills?

In Case Of Fire
Call

929-1131

Without Delay!

CLIP OUT AND POST NEAR YOUR TELEPHONE



THIS COULD HAPPEN TO YOU—The old Victory Village Day Care Center is shown after it was destroyed by fire on March 28, 1956. Forty children were in the building when the fire started from a faulty oil-fired furnace. No one was hurt, but

the building and its contents were completely ravaged before firemen and students brought the blaze under control after 20 minutes. It was the largest of several minor fires that have threatened the village over the years.—Photo by UNC Photo Lab.