

The Daily Tar Heel

SUMMER EDITION
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FRATERNITY FIRE LEAVES FIVE DEAD

Cigarette Might Have Caused Blaze

Remembering Those We Have Lost

BY JEANNE FUGATE
EDITOR

Days after a fire gutted the Phi Gamma Delta fraternity house killing five UNC students, investigators have begun to draw a picture of how the blaze swept through the quiet house after a pre-graduation bash had ended.

Investigators have concluded that Sunday's pre-dawn fire was accidental, Chapel Hill Fire Chief Dan Jones said Monday. The blaze started in the southeast corner of the basement, where the fraternity kept housewares, wood, paper products and trash. A smoldering cigarette or match dropped near the bar probably started the fire.

All eight people who were in the building when the fire struck have been accounted for, investigators said. The three survivors escaped the blaze by jumping out a second-floor window onto the fraternity house lawn.

The State Bureau of Investigation,

Chapel Hill Police and Fire Departments and the Orange County Emergency Services completed their collaborative investigation Monday after searching the house until 10 p.m. Sunday.

The team could not definitely ascertain the cause. "An actual cause of ignition will be impossible to determine," Jones said.

Assistant Fire Marshal Larry Johnson said that the downstairs room had old pine panelling that helped the fire to spread quickly. He said doors — including all the upstairs bedroom doors — and windows were open, allowing for the fire to burn and move rapidly.

The fraternity had propped open the door to the basement as well. Johnson said if that door had been closed, the fire would not have spread so quickly because the door would have stopped oxygen flow.

The medical examiner completed alcohol and carbon monoxide testing on the five victims from the fraternity fire and issued an official statement Wednesday.

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Chapel Hill May Require Sprinklers
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Firefighters combat the blaze that killed five students early Sunday morning.

BY JEANNE FUGATE
EDITOR

"Remember when you were young you shone like the sun," the rock band Pink Floyd sang.

The lyric must have struck a chord in one young man. Mark Briggs Strickland, a victim of Sunday's Phi Gamma Delta fraternity house fire, had this quote printed by his senior picture in the 1993 Rocky Mount Academy yearbook. Above the quote, one picture shows a much younger Strickland, in a captain's hat, behind the wheels of an airplane. Strickland also beams from another high school picture with a smiling date.

Right below Strickland's yearbook picture, Josh Weaver smiles awkwardly.

Strickland and Weaver, both juniors from Rocky Mount, shared a yearbook page, a lifelong friendship and a similarly tragic death. The fire claimed

the lives of a childhood friend of theirs, Anne McBride Smith, also a junior from Rocky Mount; as well as that of Joanna Howell, a junior from Cary, and Ben Woodruff, a sophomore from Raleigh.

People who have read Strickland's quote said they sensed the irony during a time when everyone is grappling to remember the victims.

"This is the time when brotherhood and sisterhood mean the most," Dean of Greek Affairs Ron Binder told the three organizations that lost members.

As friends and family spoke about the people who were now gone, they continued to emphasize the importance of the friendships these students formed with their peers, their families and their community.

Josh Weaver

Josh Weaver took on many different

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Students grieve outside the charred house Sunday afternoon.



Firefighters remove a body from the wreckage at Phi Gamma Delta.



Joanna Kristine Howell, 21, a junior from Cary, majored in journalism



Benjamin Watson Woodruff, 20, a sophomore from Raleigh, majored in economics



Mark Briggs Strickland, 21, a junior from Rocky Mount, majored in biology



Robert Joshua Weaver, 20, a junior from Rocky Mount, majored in biology



Anne McBride Smith, 21, a junior from Rocky Mount, majored in English

'Real World' Intrudes Earlier Than Graduates Had Expected

Nearly 4,000 members of the Class of 1996 graduated in front of 30,000 on-lookers.

BY JOHN SWEENEY
UNIVERSITY EDITOR

For the nearly 4,000 members of the University community who donned caps and gowns on May 12, this trip to Kenan Stadium was not about sell-out sports. Instead, it marked an important, yet imperceptible metamorphosis: the transformation from UNC student to UNC graduate.

UNC celebrated its 194th annual commencement exercises on a cool, sunny Carolina morning with about 30,000 friends and relatives of graduates looking on.

Nobel Prize winning Irish poet Seamus Heaney delivered the keynote address.

Before the ceremony began, Chancellor Michael Hooker touched on a tragedy that no one in the stadium would recognize until later.

"Right now our thoughts are with those who are affected by the fire," he said.

Although authorities confirmed five deaths from the Phi Gamma Delta fraternity house fire before noon, the ceremony went on without anyone the wiser.

For the graduates, it was both an ending



Members of the class of 1996 celebrate their graduation at commencement on Sunday morning at Kenan Stadium.

and a beginning, as academic careers were left behind, and new lives in the "real world" got started.

"We came expecting, we leave remembering, we came with nothing, we leave with everything," said Thad Woody, president of the class of 1996, in his address to

the graduates.

Chancellor Michael Hooker remarked that it was his first UNC commencement, not just as chancellor, but in any capacity.

"Even though I'm an alum of Carolina,"

See GRADUATION, Page 2

Tar Heel Point Guard Opts for NBA Draft

Jeff McInnis became the seventh UNC basketball player to leave school early for the pros.

BY ROBBIE PICKERAL
SENIOR WRITER

Questions, questions. That's all that remained last week when Tar Heel junior basketball player Jeff McInnis announced that he would forego his senior year to enter the NBA draft: questions about his draft status, questions about his reasoning, questions about a UNC

hoops team that would have been favored to win the ACC had its starting point guard returned.

McInnis, who was a second-team All-ACC selection this season, went against the advice of his mother and several pro scouts when he announced via a press release May 8 that he would leave behind the UNC argyle. "It may not seem



Coach Dean Smith said he didn't expect JEFF MCINNIS to be picked early.

to be the best decision for my placement in the draft this year as opposed to next, but it has become necessary for several personal reasons, the greatest of which is to help my family financially," McInnis said in the release.

Indeed, McInnis is one of a bevy of guards to leave school early to enter the draft.

Georgetown's Allen Iverson, a sophomore, and Georgia Tech freshman Stephon Marbury are expected to be the first two point guards taken on June 28th, leaving McInnis in a pack of six-to-seven other guards waiting for their names to be called.

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Bodybuilder Arrested in Carrboro Murder

Stacy Jones was charged with first degree murder for the Friday slaying of Heather Dawn Prather.

BY AMY CAPPIELLO
CITY EDITOR

The murder of Carrboro resident Heather Dawn Prather came one step closer to being solved Sunday night after an acquaintance, Stacy Jones, was arrested outside of Gotham night club.

Although police would not comment on what led them to suspect Jones' in-

volvement with Prather's death, they did say both frequented Gold's Gym in Carrboro. Jones was an avid weight lifter and Prather was a part-time instructor at the facility. Thus far, Jones has made no statement about his involvement in Prather's death. However, police did say Prather's abandoned car was found about 300 feet from Jones' house.

Twelve law enforcement agents arrived at the scene of Jones' arrest at Gotham. There were officers from Carrboro and Chapel Hill as well as State Bureau of Investigation officers. Carrboro police Sgt. Joel Booker said they arrested Jones without incident in a back alley of the club.

"The bouncers, who he knew, asked

him to step outside," Booker said. "They didn't tell him why. We did it that way to protect the people in the bar, Mr. Jones and ourselves."

Jones had his first court appearance Monday afternoon. He was charged with first degree murder and was appointed a public defender, Booker said. District Attorney Carl Fox said he and Jim Woodall will be prosecuting the case while James Williams will defend Jones. Fox said he did not yet know whether he would seek the death penalty for Jones. He said that decision depended on a hearing that will be held in June to determine if the case will be

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Make that world before you a better one by going into it with boldness.

Seamus Heaney