

Fire Damages Local Barbecue Restaurant

By JON DOUGHERTY
Assistant City Editor

A fire erupted at Allen & Son Pit Cooked Bar-B-Que on Thursday afternoon when a gas line sparked, causing extensive damage to the structure.

The cause of the fire still is unknown, and no injuries were reported.

The fire was reported to the Chapel Hill Fire Department at 3:51 p.m. and officials arrived at restaurant, at 6203 N.C. 86, within five minutes.

Other agencies, including the New

Hope, Hillsborough and Eno fire departments, assisted the Chapel Hill Fire Department. The restaurant is located in the New Hope district.

By the time fire officials arrived on the scene, a natural gas line had burst, fueling the blaze.

"We have to get above the fire, spray water on the area and of course, turn off the gas," said Chapel Hill Deputy Fire Chief Robert Bosworth, while firefighters combed the building for potential hot spots.

At least 25 firefighters worked dili-

gently to fight the blaze, which was extinguished in less than an hour.

Damage to the roof and outer walls was visible, but Bosworth said interior damage to the building was even worse than what could be seen from the outside.

"The kitchen is pretty much gone," Bosworth said. "There's going to be a lot of damage from fire, water, and smoke."

Piedmont Electric was also on hand to prevent the electricity in the building from complicating the fire fighting efforts.

"When we have a fire like this, what

(the electric company) does is to pull the meter from the building," Bosworth said.

Allen and Son's proprietor could not be reached for comment Thursday night.

Bosworth said officials will investigate the fire further.

"We cannot at this time determine the full extent of the damage, but they sure won't be open for dinner tonight."

The City Editor can be reached at citydesk@unc.edu.

Developments in the War on Terrorism

U.S. Sends al-Qaida Prisoners to Cuba

U.S. Marines began an extraordinary security mission Thursday night — flying the first 20 of hundreds of al-Qaida prisoners to a U.S. base at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba to be held for questioning and possible trial. See Online.



FOR MORE UPDATES, SEE WWW.DAILYTARHEEL.COM

U.S. Probes Air Crash in Pakistan

The fireball erupting from a downed U.S. military aircraft in Pakistan apparently was created by crashing into a mountain ridge rather than by hostile fire, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said Thursday. The crash killed seven Marines. See Online.

Bush Warns Iranian Officials

President Bush warned Iranian officials Thursday not to harbor al-Qaida fighters fleeing Afghanistan and not to try to destabilize the country's new government. Iranians and Americans have worked together to fight the Taliban. See Online.

Campus Calendar

Today

7:30 p.m. — Mu Beta Psi is hosting a benefit concert for the Red Cross with the Clef Hangers, Tar Heel Voices, Psalm 100, Harmonyx, Vision, Alpha Phi Alpha and the Walk-Ons in the Hanes Art Center. Tickets are \$5 in the Pit or \$7 at the door.

Monday

5:30 p.m. — UNC's LGBT Rap Group

will be holding its first meeting until 7 p.m. For more information, contact Marcie Fisher at 966-3462 or e-mail her at fisherm@email.unc.edu.

Tuesday

11 a.m. — Interested in studying abroad? Come to the Study Abroad Mini-Fair, hosted by the UNC Study Abroad Office, to learn more about UNC's wide variety of programs. The fair will be held until 2 p.m. in Room

211-212 of the Student Union.

7 p.m. — Kappa Psi Pharmaceutical fraternity is holding an information session for those who are interested in pharmacy school. It will be held in Beard Hall. Call Maria at 968-3038 for details.

The Daily Tar Heel

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Easley Commutes Death Sentence

The Associated Press

RALEIGH — A condemned man who steadfastly denied beating his girlfriend to death in 1990 escaped execution Thursday as Gov. Mike Easley commuted his death sentence to life in prison.

Charlie Mason Alston Jr., 42, was to die by injection at 2 a.m. Friday at Central Prison. Easley's decision was announced shortly after 5 p.m. Thursday.

"This is the best day I've seen in a long time. The good Lord sure is good to us, and the governor, too," said Alston's father, Charlie Mason Alston Sr.

Alston himself released a statement thanking Easley "for giving me a chance to enjoy another day in this wonderful world."

Alston was sentenced to death in 1992 for the beating and suffocation death of his former girlfriend, Pamela Renee Perry, who was hit in the face with a hammer. No one saw the killing, and no blood or fingerprint evidence connected the attack to Alston, who had been convicted about six weeks earlier of assaulting Perry.

Alston, a brick mason, contended his innocence would be proved by DNA tests on evidence that has disappeared.

Prosecutors said the evidence, scrapings from beneath Perry's fingernails, would confirm the guilty verdict.

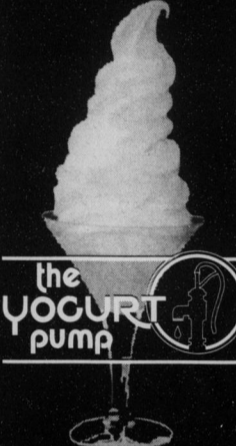
At the time, DNA evidence wasn't commonly used in murder trials. Just last year, the legislature approved a law allowing every inmate charged with first-degree murder to request a DNA test.

Defense attorneys asked Easley to grant clemency because the law should apply to Alston. State courts already have rejected similar arguments.

Easley did not specify why he commuted the sentence. "After long and careful consideration of all the facts and circumstances of this case in its entirety, I conclude that the appropriate sentence for the defendant is life in prison without parole," he said.

Alston's father said he hopes to have the conviction overturned.

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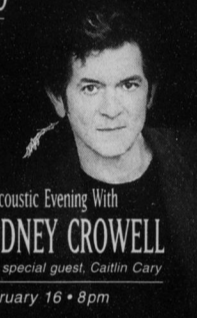
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