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Clemson reeling after fire

Blaze destroys Clemson apartments, leaves about 100 students homeless

BY MICHAEL LAFORGIA
THE GAMECOCK

More than 100 Clemson students were left homeless Wednesday night after the University Ridge apartment complex near campus burned down.

Capt. Bill Shiver of the Clemson University Fire Department said firefighters received a call at 9:34 p.m. Wednesday but were unable to save the structure.

"The entire complex was completely gutted," Shiver said. "It was a total loss."

Investigators have yet to determine the fire's cause.

Shiver said about 100 rescue workers from six departments responded, and it took two hours to get the blaze under control. Crews were still sifting through the debris late Thursday looking for hot spots. Shiver said there is still a possibility that high winds could re-ignite the flames.

Temperatures were hovering at or slightly above freezing all night Wednesday.

"The weather was a challenge," Shiver said. He added that the property's location on a hill also hindered firefighting efforts and that 35-40 mile an hour winds threatened to spread the fire to other structures.



Clemson students watch as the University Ridge apartment complex burns Wednesday night.

PHOTO BY EMILY CAGGIANO/THE TIGER

However, firefighters contained the damage to the apartment complex.

One girl was transported to a local hospital for smoke inhalation, Shiver said.

Emily Manning, a fourth-year economics student at Clemson,

lived on the third floor of the apartment complex.

She said a police officer pounded on her door at about 9:45 p.m. and told her and her roommate to get out of the building. The two girls walked out expecting to return in an hour or so. Instead,

Manning, a Delaware resident, said she lost her entire life when her apartment burned.

"I'm starting from scratch," she said, speaking on a cell phone from a Target in Atlanta where

◆ FIRE, SEE PAGE 3

Cancer claims life of mentor

BY GABRIELLE SINCLAIR
THE GAMECOCK

Mike Witkoski, a USC public relations professor and mentor to students, died of cancer Wednesday after a yearlong fight. He was 52.

Witkoski was a standout teacher known for his calming presence and dedication to students, said fourth-year advertising student Diana Carey, who asked Witkoski to be her independent study adviser for the spring semester.

"He challenges you to do things, but he's so willing to help you out in doing them," she said. "He's what every teacher wants to be remembered as."

Witkoski joined the College of Journalism and Mass Communications in 1998, first as an adjunct and then as an assistant professor.

He anchored his teaching with experience as vice president of Ferillo and Associates, a public relations and advertising firm.

Witkoski continued to teach throughout his illness.

"His spirit was pretty remarkable all the time," said dean Charles Bierbauer, who spoke with Witkoski Tuesday. "He said that the classes are the easy part; the classes are what he looks forward to."

PR professor Bruce Konkle said there is a somber atmosphere since the news broke.

"He was one of those personal professors who got to know his students really well," Konkle said.

Second-year advertising student Carrie Frondorf said Witkoski used his breadth of PR experience to his class's benefit.

"He wasn't like a regular lecturer," she said. "He was very much about getting us involved... He wasn't one of those teachers who wanted you to memorize everything in the book. He wanted you to be able to apply it in real life situations."

Witkoski didn't talk much about his cancer and instead tried to focus on the positive.

"He was a fairly private person, and really highly thought of at the

◆ PROFESSOR, SEE PAGE 4

Smile. It's snowing



PHOTO BY PATRICK AUGUSTINE/THE GAMECOCK

Snow drapes the tops of cars briefly Thursday night.

Snow sprinkles Columbia

FROM STAFF AND WIRE REPORTS

Students had a massive snowball fight on the Horseshoe Thursday night as Columbia received the remnants of a winter storm that left parts of the upstate with as much as 8 inches of snow.

The National Weather Service issued a winter weather advisory until midnight Tuesday, with highs expected in the 40s today. At press time, there was no word on whether

USC would cancel classes.

First-year biology student Mitul Patel said he thinks classes should be canceled today because of hazardous conditions.

"I just about slipped and busted my ass outside," he said.

But for the rest of the state, forecasters expect more extreme winter weather to develop through this morning, possibly leaving up to a foot of snow in some places between Gaffney and Cheraw.

Professor addresses modern civil rights

BY JACOB DAVIS
THE GAMECOCK

As Black History Month draws to a close this week, Cleveland Sellers Jr., a professor of African-American Studies at USC, presented a scholarly perspective on the civil rights movement Tuesday night.

At a presentation in the Russell House, the Denmark, S.C., native spoke on the past, present and future of the movement and its leaders.

Born in 1944 and active in the civil rights struggle since 1960, Sellers describes the pathways blazed by the many teachers in his family - figures who, "being minority teachers in the South at that time, were involved in the civil rights movement whether they wanted to be or not," Sellers said. He followed their strong example to a life-

time of activism and education on the subject of civil and minority rights.

Sellers said it is especially gratifying to see the poor being lifted, and he is empowered by the movement for better lives.

He is also increasingly pleased with the current political situation, especially the swelling ranks of minority office-holders. But he cautions that while the situation is improving, there is still much work to be done.

Speaking on the state of today's civil rights movement, Sellers said he sees a need for a "period of education" to better inform everyone on minority rights. He also sees the need to organize, so the movement can be a strong and effective body working for positive change.

As for those who will continue on in the legacy of the

great civil rights leaders, Sellers sees promise and potential. He said he is proud of the youth he encounters, especially those beginning to question their roles in society; he cited those youth who took an active interest and spoke out against the war in Iraq.

He was also pleased by the progress being made in affirmative action and an increased interest in civil rights and minority issues.

Sellers stressed the need for the movement to diversify, and that it is crucial for it to grow intellectually and remain viable. He said he sees this happening through diverse groups coming together and "finding common ground" on which the solid base of the movement's continuing future can be built.

Comments on this story? E-mail gamecocknews@gwm.sc.edu

Strom sprinkler causes \$175,000 damages

BY GREG WEBSTER
THE GAMECOCK

A sprinkler at the Strom Thurmond Wellness & Fitness Center caused more than \$175,000 in damage last week, jeopardizing Dance Marathon and pushing campus recreation staff to the limit.

Facility Coordinator Michael Hyde received a call at 10:30 p.m. on Feb. 16 that a fire sprinkler was raining down on the gym floor. A stray basketball had struck the sprinkler, pouring water for more than 30 minutes and eventually leaking into two of the racquetball courts.

Director of Student Life Jerry Brewer said he hopes the damage

will be fixed by the end of March.

"This is a situation where the student is a consumer," he said. "You have paid to use the building, and we're determined to get it back in shape as soon as possible."

With water still falling from the ceiling and with the buzz of the fire alarm, Hyde immediately contacted the fire department and his supervisors to contain the water.

Among those who arrived at the scene to assist in cleaning up

was Jerry Brewer.

Brewer, Hyde and approximately 24 other staff members, worked well into the night to limit the damage. Describing the situation as "possibly being much worse," Brewer said the ability of the staff to contain the damage was "a tribute to their hard work."

Only a few hours after most of the staff went home for the night, the fitness center reopened the next morning for Dance Marathon.

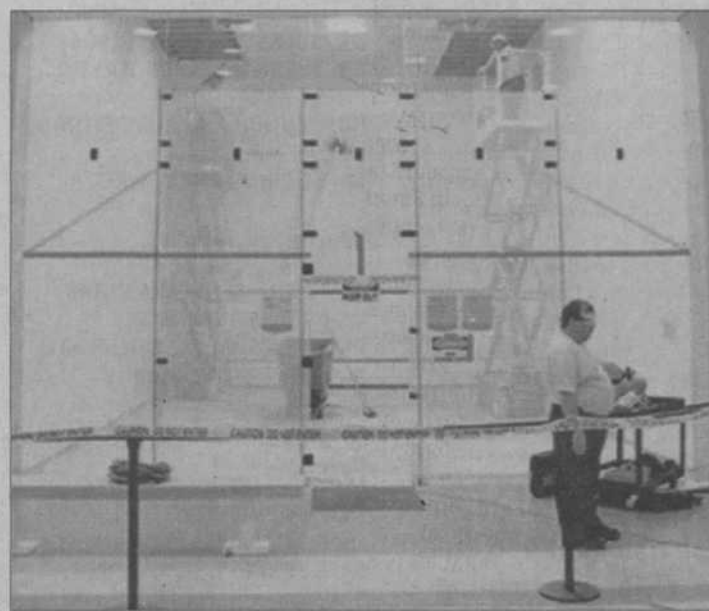
But Brewer still considers the

damage serious. Basketball courts one and two are closed, laden with new planks of hardwood waiting to be nailed down. Meanwhile, two racquetball courts are closed underneath the basketball courts with fans airing out the remaining water.

When first-year business student Robert Schultz walked to the fitness center to play racquetball the next day, he was disappointed.

"There's nothing you can really say about something like this," he said. "It's kind of limited down there now, but there's nothing you can do about it."

Comments on this story? E-mail gamecocknews@gwm.sc.edu



A flood in the Strom Thurmond Wellness & Fitness Center has closed several racquetball courts.

PHOTO BY JASON STEELMAN/THE GAMECOCK

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Low	35
Mostly cloudy, 15 mph winds	

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