

Observer-Reporter, Tuesday, June 28, 2011

Greene County Office Building opens Monday after weekend fire

By Bob Niedbala, Staff writer niedbala@observer-reporter.com

WAYNESBURG — Though fans were running high to help clear the air, the smell of smoke still permeated the first floor and basement of Greene County Office Building Monday morning following a weekend fire in the building's lower basement.



1st floor scene – County Office Building after fire, ceiling tiles removed.



Waynesburg-Franklin Township Volunteer Fire Company was called to the building at 93 E. High St. about 7 a.m. Saturday after an emergency generator apparently malfunctioned and caught fire, said Jeff Marshall, Waynesburg fire chief and county chief clerk.

Fire was confined to the area of the generator in the lower basement, which is at the building's rear and on the level of Strawberry Alley. However, heat from the fire melted wire and plastic pipe in the lower basement and smoke filled the entire building, particularly the first, or upper, basement and the building's first floor. Wiring, plastic sewer pipe and telephone equipment in the lower basement all were damaged, Marshall said. However, he said, "it could have been a heck of a lot worse."

County maintenance employees and a restoration company, Servpro, worked during the weekend to make repairs and begin the cleanup. Pipes were replaced and electricity was restored to all but the lower basement area. Work was progressing on the county's telephone system, a new system which only became operational Friday, leaving the county with partial telephone service Monday.

By Monday morning, however, problems were more at the level of an "inconvenience," Marshall said. "The biggest hassle we're having right now is getting the smoke out of the building," he said.

Commissioner Pam Snyder also said the county was fortunate the fire was discovered when it was and extinguished quickly. She commended the fire companies for their quick response. "The Waynesburg and Jefferson fire companies, as always, were right there when you needed them," she said.

County employees also did a good job working over the weekend and Monday morning to get the building back in shape. "They've all pitched in to keep the offices operating," she said.

The emergency generator in the building apparently kicked on between 5 and 6 a.m. when West Penn Power had a planned outage in the Waynesburg area to make system upgrades, Marshall said.

Smoke was reported about 7 a.m. by people in the building next door, Victoria Square. A door in the basements connect the two buildings and smoke also entered Victoria Square.

Marshall said firefighters were able to extinguish the fire fairly easily. He said that when he first entered the building smoke on the first floor was extremely thick. The lower basement is primarily used for storage. Some old records are kept there but none were lost. Marshall said the building does not have a smoke detection system and only has a manually-activated fire alarm system. The county will be looking to upgrade the system, he said.

Jefferson Volunteer Fire Company was called to assist because the fire was initially reported in such a large building. The county office building has three floors, an upper and a lower basement.

Observer-Reporter, Thursday, July 14, 2011

Foul Odeur a Reminder of County Office Building Fire

By Cara Host, Staff writer chost@observer-reporter.com

WAYNESBURG — The smell of smoke is still evident in Greene County Office Building, more than two weeks after a minor fire broke out in the basement.

County commissioners are expected to declare the June 25 fire an emergency at their public meeting today. County leaders unofficially declared the emergency that weekend, which gave them authority to hire contractors and buy cleanup materials without going through a bidding process, which might be required under non-emergency circumstances.

The county hired a restoration company, ServPro, hours after the fire was extinguished. The firm's services likely will be covered through the county's insurance policy along with most other costs associated with the fire.

The fire started in a generator located in the lower part of the basement. Flames were confined to that area, but smoke filled the building and the smell is particularly noticeable in the basement and first floor. Air-filtration units have been in use for the past two weeks, and the stench has lessened in recent days.

Workers also will repaint walls and replace carpeting and ceiling tiles in the lower levels to mitigate the smoke smell.

The area where the fire started was primarily used to store old equipment, some of which will be replaced. Other damaged items will be discarded. The fire damaged the electrical and phone systems, which have been repaired as well as the main sewer pipe that services the building.

“There was a good bit of damage down there,” county Commissioner Pam Snyder said. “Our maintenance workers truly went above and beyond” in cleaning up the mess.