

Fire-damage Repair Plans Rushed at UA

Plans for repair of the fire-damaged University of Alaska Commons were being expedited this week in an effort to have the university's main dining facility opened in time for the fall semester.

Fire last Friday (June 14) caused an estimated half million dollars damage to the five-year-old building and resulted in the death of a student. It was the worst fire in the university's 51-year history.

Charles Sargent, executive director of planning and operations for the university, said the first step in the repair program would be to clean up debris and remove equipment so that total damage could be assessed.

Meanwhile, he added, architects will prepare bid specifications for repair of the building. "We will make every effort to have the Commons ready by fall.

This will depend upon the assessment of damage and the availability of equipment and materials," he explained.

The morning after the fire, members of the Campus Planning and Development Committee of the Board of Regents met in a special session with top UA administrative personnel to hear a report on the fire and to chart plans for repairs.

Dr. William R. Wood, UA president, voiced a need for fast action if the facility were to be ready by September. He noted that much of the equipment for the building had been custom-made and might be difficult to replace in a hurry.

He also said the university would seek a temporary loan from the state if insurance funds were not sufficient to pay for the cost of repairs.

However, Robert K. Dellanbach, assistant comptroller for management, told the meeting that the Commons was fully insured—not only for the building but also for the contents.

The building is insured by the Employers Group of Insurance Companies and officials of the firm were on campus this week, inspecting damage.

Fire Chief Willard C. Whitaker of the UA Fire Department reported that the fire apparently had not

caused any major structural damage.

He said, however, that the interior finish throughout the building, with the exception of the basement, had been destroyed.

The fire started in a deep fat fryer, holding six gallons of grease, when the grease overheated and ignited, Whitaker said. Efforts to douse the flames with fire extinguishers proved futile.

The chief said the cause of the fire was believed to be a malfunction in a thermostat that controls the temperature of the fryer. An investigation of the cause and also of the circumstances surrounding the death of the student were underway this week.

Whitaker said the student, Robyn A. Aubrey, 20, of Fairbanks, was found under a charred desk in the office of the Commons, only 15 feet from an exit to the building.

Efforts to revive Aubrey after he was taken from the office failed and he was pronounced dead at St. Joseph's Hospital in Fairbanks.

Whitaker said the student, a part-time employe of the Commons, may have gone into the office in an attempt to get something or may have mistaken the office door for an exit.