

Picking up the pieces

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
Wednesday, 27 February 2013 20:38 -



Monday blaze destroys Gothenburg Livestock

A family livelihood still smoldered Tuesday morning after a fire the day before sent smoke and flames billowing into a blue February sky.

And the community lost an auction barn that sold livestock for the past 77 years.

“It’s going to be a huge detriment to this town,” said fire chief Mark Ballmer about the loss of Gothenburg Livestock. “We’re an ag community so how do you hold sales without a barn?”

Tuesday morning, in an undamaged cafe building beside the auction barn, co-owner Kathy Brott showed some of the items that had been salvaged.

Neither Kathy or husband and co-owner Wendell Brott, who bought the business in 1991, were ready to say what comes next.

However Kathy remembered, with a smile, that the first sale the couple had in the business was on Wendell’s 30th birthday.

The fire call on Monday came about 4:25 p.m. after employees of Eastside Animal Center, a veterinary business south of the auction barn, spotted smoke rolling from the back of the building and called 911.

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When fire fighters arrived, Ballmer said the building was engulfed in smoke but there were no flames visible yet.



“We went inside with air packs and had to switch from offensive to defensive,” Ballmer said.

As flames and smoke roared upwards, fire fighters tried to douse the structure with water from hydrants and portable holding tanks.

Ballmer said getting water to fire, that had spread to the old wood frame covered by tin, was challenging.

Also the fact that the auction ring, with high open space, fueled the fire.

“Within 10 minutes that we were there, the north part of the roof came down,” he said, noting that they battled the blaze at the top instead of from inside the structure.

Fire fighters from Cozad helped fight the fire which was put out, for the most part, by 10:30 p.m.

Ballmer theorized that the fire started on the north side and said it was being investigated by the state fire marshal.

The Brotts had insurance on the building, he said, noting that he couldn't begin to guess the amount of monetary damage.

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Two dogs were in the building when the fire started, family members said, but they were let out and were uninjured.

Former Gothenburg resident Brad Stickelman, who now sells real estate in North Platte, said his grandfather—E.C. “Colonel” Stickelman—built the sale barn in 1936 with a lot of “old, good wood” after moving a business he started in 1931 in a hay barn across the street.

On sale days, he said his grandfather rode a white horse into the auction ring and carried a whip to keep livestock moving.

Stickelman worked at the sale barn while growing up until 1977 when he got into the hog-selling business.



“There are a lot of memories there,” he said.

Kathy added that the

Gothenburg community has many memories of the sale barn.

ebarrett@gothenburgtimes.com

308-537-3636