

Twenty-seven bar patrons were injured and one waitress lost her life Saturday after a fire razed Arooga's Sports Bar on Linglestown Road in Harrisburg.

Those injured in the fire had also been taken to Harrisburg Hospital to be treated for smoke inhalation. All were later released except for one.

"We're sad to report that waitress Courtney Reed, 27, has died at 7:50 p.m. from burns sustained in the Arooga's fire," reported Harrisburg Hospital Communications Director, Brian Wallace.

The fire, which started at approximately 3:15 p.m., created hysteria in the over-packed establishment.

"Everyone panicked. There was lots of screaming and I thought I was going to die," said Emily Reading, 17, who had been eating at the restaurant with her family.

Prior to the fire, the bar had been packed with basketball fans watching the many college games. It's carrying capacity of 171 was exceeded by almost 30 customers; fire officials estimated 200 people were in the bar when the fire sparked.

Amidst the panic, one waitress, Reed, rounded-up patrons to lead them from the bar. On her first trip, she met a disturbing obstacle: the emergency exit was locked.

Having worked at the bar since 2010, Reed backtracked and led the patrons through the smoke toward the front entrance. According to Reed's sister, Samantha Waltermeyer, 30, she made this trip several times to evacuate everyone from the blazing establishment. On her last trip through the bar, she sustained severe burns.

Jon Anderson, 47, was one of those Reed led through the bar. "If it weren't for that waitress, a lot of people would have died. She led many of us through the smoke. I can't believe the emergency exit was locked."

The Linglestown Fire Department was called to the scene after the bar's cook, Joe Farrell, reported the incident. Farrell had no comment as to what started the fire.

By the time the fire department reached the location, approximately 17 minutes later, the bar was destroyed.

Linglestown Fire Chief, Mike Miedlar, explained the delay: "There was lots of traffic. It took 17 minutes to get here. That is too long, we could have saved it."

All that was left of the bar was the stone fireplace.

Miedlar speculated that the fire started in the kitchen, most likely to a grease or electrical fire, and estimated the damage to be about \$500,000. Fire Marshal Robert Frymoyer will make the final determination after he surveys the rubble. More information will be available next week.

The most disturbing aspect of this fire is that the loss of life could have easily been prevented.

Police officer, Joe Quattrocchi of Lower Paxton Township, commented, "There were no smoke detectors or sprinklers in operation and the emergency exit was locked. This guy (referring to owner, John Guarnera) is in a lot of trouble."

Devan Zimmerman

Fire Story

Journalism

Stephanie Reed was engaged to Sergeant Tim Mekel, who is currently serving his third tour of duty with the Marines in Afghanistan. He is due back on leave next week.

She had been a student at Harrisburg Area Community College studying to be a veterinarian, and was planning to transfer to the University of Pennsylvania, where her fiance had accepted a job as a police officer after his military service. The couple was to be married in June.

“It took about two hours to completely put it out. The place is a total loss.”

Where: Arooga’s Sports Bar - 3710 Linglestown Road, corner of Colonial Road & Linglestown Road in Harrisburg

When: Saturday

Time: 3:15 p.m.

How it started: Linglestown Fire Chief Mike Miedlar speculated the fire started in the kitchen, most likely due to a grease or electrical fire. Fire Marshal Robert Frymoyer will make final determination after he surveys the rubble, information will be available next week. Fire Miedlar estimated the damages to be about \$500,000.

Victims: 27 people were injured, one person, a waitress, dead. All taken to Harrisburg Hospital by bus and ambulance to be treated for smoke inhalation. Courtney Reed, the waitress, suffered from severe burns. The seating capacity is 171, though the bar was packed with basketball fans watching the many college games, fire officials estimated about 200 people were in the bar when the fire broke out, almost 30 over capacity.

Facts:

-The bar was insured for \$1 million. According to the owner, no decision has been made as to whether or not he will rebuild.

-All that was left of the place as the stone fireplace → razed

-Joe Farrell, cook, made 911 call -no comment

-A Two Alarm Fire: Because of the large number of people sent to the hospital, a second fire company, the Susquehanna Township Fire Company arrived to help finish putting out the fire.

-Six ambulances from surrounding townships and a Central Dauphin school bus were used to transfer the injured.

Direct Quotes:

“This place was my life and I don’t know what I’m going to do. Thank God for insurance.”, bar owner → arrived shortly after the fire occurred

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Police Officer

Devan Zimmerman

Fire Story

Journalism

Indirect quotes:

-Packed with basketball fans watching the many college basketball games

-Reed went back into the bar several times to help lead patrons out, and was severely burned on her last try. -