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The Kirksville Fire Department works to put out the fire located at 201 E. Illinois Street. The fire department was on the scene from about 10:30 p.m. April 9 until 9 a.m. April 10 fighting to contain it. Fire departments from Adair County and La Plata, Mo. assisted in controlling the fire.

Former business destroyed, owner unsure of next steps

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Kirksville resident Steve Ellis, owner of the commercial property that caught fire last Thursday at 201 E. Illinois St., said he has not yet decided what to do with the destroyed property that housed his family business for almost 40 years.

The vacant building at 201 E. Illinois burned from last Thursday night until the following Friday morning at about 5 a.m. No one was injured in the fire.

Ellis said his grandfather purchased the building during 1971 to house Simpson Printing Company. He said he, his grandfather, father and brother worked at the family business when it was located at 201 E. Illinois, and he said it was difficult for him emotionally when he learned the building had burned.

"It's just a terrible loss we've had," Ellis said. "Our business had been there for so many years.

We had other businesses looking at it, we had interest in renting the building, and now it's gone. It's just a really terrible situation all around."

Ellis said he recently leased the building to an individual who had planned to start an interior design business in the building. Ellis said he put the building up for rent following Scrapper's Den's move last June to its current location at 106 E. Illinois St., Ellis said.

Ellis said he continues to operate the family business, now S&S Printing and Graphics, located at 701 N. Marion St.

The Kirksville Fire Department responded to the fire at about 10:40 p.m. last Thursday when an on-duty Kirksville firefighter saw smoke spewing from the building, Kirksville Fire Chief Tom Collins said.

Collins said 17 Kirksville firefighters fought the blaze and were assisted by firefighters from Adair County and La Plata, Missouri. Wind significantly hindered firefighters' efforts to control the fire, and the building was a total loss, he said.

"We weren't going to change the outcome of the fire, but the wind made it a lot more touchy," Collins said. "We probably could have knocked it down

from the roof [if it hadn't been so windy], but we weren't comfortable putting anyone inside [the building] to fight the fire."

Residents of an adjacent home at 205 E. Illinois and employees at the nearby Conoco gas station at 202 E. Illinois were evacuated because firefighters were concerned the windy conditions might spread the fire. Collins said the home suffered minor heat damage, but the Conoco gas station was undamaged.

The state fire marshal and Kirksville Fire Department were on the scene until 9 a.m. Friday morning to investigate and prevent any hot spots from reigniting. Mike O'Connell, Communications Director at the Missouri Department of Public Safety, said in an email the Division of Fire Safety has categorized the fire's cause and origin as undetermined pending the conclusion of the state fire marshal's investigation.

Kirksville resident Hershal Starbuck, who lives at 205 E. Illinois, said he saw smoke from his apartment window at about 10:45 p.m. last Thursday night.

"My dog was barking like crazy, and then I heard someone shout 'Fire!'" Starbuck said. "Nobody else in the house had their phone on them, so I picked up my cell phone and called 911."

Starbuck said he was concerned nearby natural gas lines that serve his home might ignite. However, firefighters succeeded at containing the blaze to 201 E. Illinois.

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—Kirksville resident Steve Ellis



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Left: The fire burns across the roof of the former Scrapper's Den. Right: Firefighters tackle the fire from above, working against the heat of the fire and the strong winds during the night. Kirksville resident Steve Ellis, owner of the destroyed property, said he is unsure what he will do with the property.



Ingrid Roettgen/TMN

The former Scrapper's Den location is now in ruins. A fire occurred at the property the evening of April 9, and residents of surrounding properties were evacuated because of safety concerns. The fire marshal's investigation as to the cause of the fire still is pending.