



# NEWS RELEASE

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Nov. 12, 2016

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## **Fire heavily damages Black Chamber of Commerce structure in downtown Beaufort Saturday**

Blazing fire heavily damaged the Beaufort County Black Chamber of Commerce structure at 711 Bladen Street in downtown Beaufort early Saturday morning, Nov. 12, and the cause of the fire remained under investigation.

The three-story building was under construction and nearing completion but wasn't occupied. No one was injured in the fire, including emergency responders. Traffic remained blocked Saturday at the site of the fire at Bladen and Duke streets.

Investigators from the State Law Enforcement Division and the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms were joining local fire teams to determine the cause of the fire and where it started, said Beaufort-Port Royal Fire Chief Reece Bertholf.

The first alarm came in around 1:40 a.m. It took about three hours for firefighters to contain the blaze with help from several surrounding fire departments and fire districts, including MCAS Beaufort.

By mid-morning Saturday the fire was down, but firefighters continued to extinguish hot spots during the day. While the building was heavily damaged, Bertholf said containing the fire to the one location kept it from spreading to nearby homes and businesses.

"We are fortunate to have highly-trained firefighters on our department and with the departments that provided us much-needed assistance," Bertholf said. "Any time there is a fire like this in a dense urban area, we worry about controlling the fire and keeping it away from other structures."

Helping put down the fire were six pumper trucks and three ladder aerial truckers and more than 40 firefighters – both on-duty and off-duty. Responding units included the City of Beaufort/Town of Port Royal Fire Department, Burton Fire District, Lady's Island-St. Helena Fire District, MCAS Beaufort, and Fripp Island Fire Department.

The Red Cross provided aide, food and drinks for emergency responders at the fire, and the Beaufort County Sheriff's Office Emergency Management Division provided a mobile command center, Bertholf said. Beaufort police were on the scene throughout the night and day.

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