



City of Beaufort/Town of Port Royal Fire Department

# NEWS RELEASE

**For immediate release**

---

Wednesday, November 16, 2016

Contact: Fire Chief Reece Bertholf, 843-754-9144

In conjunction with the ATF National Response Team the investigative partners at the Beaufort County Black Chamber of Commerce Fire have concluded the scene investigation.

*Cause of the fire determined to be accidental*

Beaufort, S.C – The City of Beaufort/Town of Port Royal Fire Department (COB/TPR FD) in conjunction with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) and the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED) today announced the preliminary findings of the origin and cause investigation into the fire at 711 Bladen Street, The Beaufort County Black Chamber of Commerce, which occurred on Nov. 12, 2016. While components of the investigation process are ongoing, the investigative team has determined that the fire was accidental.

It was determined that the fire started between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> floors in a space that had no access. This space is common in modern construction techniques and exists due to the engineered truss systems that are utilized in vertical construction. After initial framing and utilities are placed spaces like this one are sealed off permanently, as was the case in this building.

Multiple agencies have assisted in the 4-day investigation on scene. The COB/TPR FD has been assisted by the ATF, SLED, City of Beaufort Police Department, Beaufort County Sheriff's Office, Red Cross, and Salvation Army. "Without our local, state, and Federal partners there is no way what was accomplished in 4 days could have occurred. I am very grateful for all the agencies responding and helping our agency" said Fire Chief Reece Bertholf.

The COB/TPR FD put the fire scene investigation system they use into motion as the fire was still burning early Saturday morning. Our in-house fire investigators and Chief quickly realized that the size and scope of the incident would outpace our in-house resources. The Beaufort County Fire Scene Investigation team was called out along with SLED early on and in conference with these partners the decision was immediately made to call on the expertise of the ATF.



“The decision processes made in conjunction with this incident by Chief Bertholf and Beaufort PD Chief Clancy brought the highest level of expertise and professionalism to our community to find us answers to this tragic property loss” said Beaufort City Manager Bill Prokop.

Citizens will continue to experience road closures at the intersection of Duke and Bladen streets as insurance investigations will continue for the days to come.

The City of Beaufort Fire Department will hold a press conference at 5 pm, 11/16/2016, at the COB/TPR Headquarters Fire Station, 135 Ribaut Rd, Beaufort, S.C.