

Big Bamboo goes up in smoke Officials believe vagrants started fire



By Brian McBride News-Gazette Staff Writer

A fire destroyed a former popular Osceola County lounge Sunday that closed in 2004 due to hurricane damage. State fire marshal's office investigators said they believe that vagrants seeking warmth caused the fire that raged through the Big Bamboo Lounge, 4849 W. U.S Highway 192, commonly known as the "Boo."

It was a cold night Sunday and transients inside the vacant building may have lit a fire to keep warm, said State Fire Investigator Juan Bailey. The lounge had closed after more than 25 years in business.

"That's the best scenario we could come up with," Bailey said. "Nothing suspicious."

Clothing was found inside the burned building after units from Osceola County Fire Rescue, Kissimmee Fire Department and Orange County Fire Rescue responded to the 5 p.m. blaze.

"As far as the damage was concerned, it was a total loss," said Osceola County spokesman Larry Krause.

The lounge, with an abandoned military truck and observation tower out front, drew a faithful crowd of Walt Disney World cast members and British visitors over the years.

Bruce Muir, a World War II fighter pilot, opened the bar in 1977 and modeled it after those he encountered on his travels through the South Pacific. Muir died in 1999 at age 79.

Kissimmee resident John Kerr, a bar regular and former handyman, still operates an unofficial Web site in its honor. At press time Friday morning the site had 116,117 hits.

"The place had built a following like you wouldn't believe," he said. "It was a safe and quiet place. No one would hassle you."

The walls had been covered with nametags, T-shirts, hats, business cards, newspaper clippings and photographs and a couple of aviator helmets. There was foreign money taped behind the bar. Some of the tables were large wooden spools.

What will happen with the property was unknown Friday. The owners — Muir's wife, Glenda, and his two daughters — could not be reached for comment.

"Some of my best memories from Florida were at the Big Bamboo," wrote South Africa native Thomas Adams on a guest sign-in section on the Web site in 2004. "Thanks for the smiles, conversation."

The site currently has 128 pages of warm comments written by former patrons from all over the world.

Kerr said he planned to keep the site running as long as possible.

"To tell you the truth, there is no other place like it anymore," he said.

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