



Aerial truck is placed into position outside Stark Hall in Wilkes-Barre.

Fire hits building on Wilkes campus

Blaze battled in roof at Stark Learning Center

By James Conmy
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Wilkes University had to cancel night classes at the Stark Learning Center on Wednesday after an exhaust fan and roofing materials caught fire.

The fire was contained to a small mechanical room on the building's roof by the Wilkes-Barre Fire Department and extinguished shortly after 5 p.m.

Vaughn Shinkus, a university spokesman, said Stark Learning Center would resume its normal class schedule today. The four-story building houses science classrooms and faculty offices.

Smoke billowed through the building and it was evacuated seconds after the fire started. No one was injured.

Shinkus said the mechanical room contains the structure's

heating, ventilation and air conditioning units, furnaces and an air handler. He added that Roof Pro of Wyoming had been hired by the university and workers from the company were working on the building's roof on Wednesday.

When firefighters were dispatched to the scene, people were reported to be on the roof.

Wilkes-Barre Fire Chief Jay Delaney later said the people on the roof were the same workers using fire extinguishers to try to put out the fire.

Chief Delaney explained the department's original concern was that there were people trapped on the roof and Kingston's ladder truck was called for backup.

However, the Kingston truck was not used. The chief emphasized he would rather be safe than sorry.

"We were just thinking a little bit ahead and wanted back up," noted Chief Delaney after the fire. "We didn't have to use

Kingston's truck, but I'm glad they were there just in case."

Rush hour traffic was rerouted from South River Street while firefighters battled the blaze. The fire gave off heavy smoke, which was seen by motorists traveling over the Market Street Bridge, the Veterans Memorial Bridge and the North Cross Valley Expressway.

Chief Delaney said calls came in from as far away as the Wyoming Valley Mall to report the smoke.

The cause of the fire remains under investigation, but the chief speculated it was an accident.

"It appears accidental, but Capt. (William) Sharksnas, the city's fire investigator, has to do more work before making a final determination," outlined Chief Delaney. "Capt. Sharksnas will be back on the scene around 8 a.m. to wrap up his investigation."

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Roof fire at Wilkes forces evacuation



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TIMES LEADER STAFF PHOTO/PETE G. WILCOX

About 50 faculty, students and staff at Wilkes University's Stark Learning Center in Wilkes-Barre were evacuated Wednesday afternoon when a fire broke out on the roof. The South River Street building's fifth floor mechanical room — which houses air conditioning and other equipment — caught fire just before 5 p.m., said city Fire Battalion Chief Edward Snarski. Witnesses from nearby university buildings saw flames shooting from the roof, Wilkes spokesman Vaughn Shinkus said. Several maintenance workers unsuccessfully attempted to douse the fire with a powder extinguisher. By 5:25 p.m., the fire department put out the blaze. "It is unclear whether the fire started within or on the exterior of the building since we've been doing repairs on the roof," Shinkus said. The building houses science laboratory rooms, classrooms and offices, he said. Classes were canceled Wednesday evening, but classes will resume today, Shinkus said. The cause of the blaze is under investigation, but Snarski said it doesn't appear suspicious. About 20 firefighters responded and the Kingston Fire Department was on standby, Snarski said.