

37 HURT FLEEING LI SCHOOL FIRE

Probe Wiring, 2 Clamped Windows

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(Newsday Photo by Lyons)

HURT—BUT SAFE. An unidentified student is carried from Bellport Junior-Senior High School after she was hurt in a flash fire that swept through the two-story structure just before the end of the school day yesterday. Fifty-two students and school personnel

were injured, 37 hospitalized. Officials said it was a miracle that none of the 990 persons in the building was killed as fire raced through structure. Some students escaped by leaping from second-floor window. (Stories, other photos on Page 3, Back Page; full page of photos on Page 14.)

Your License Plate May Earn a Prize

(For Details of Newsday's New Game, Offering Some Big Bonus Prizes, See Page 7)

37 Are Injured In School Fire

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flames were sweeping up from the ground floor. "I thought it was just another drill until I reached the stairway," said 17-year-old senior David Hassell, a volunteer fireman whose father is Bellport Fire Commissioner E. Floyd Hassell.

"The stairway was full of thick, black smoke," David said. "Like oil burning. I ran to a window at the end of the hall, but there were a lot of kids pushing. I couldn't open it so I broke out a pane and started crawling through. Before I knew it, I was pushed out. It was awful . . . I never thought I would get scared but the smoke was so bad that after just to whiffs it nearly knocked you out."

Hassell was at the other clamped window. And that was where almost all of the injuries occurred.

Feeney said he did not know there were clamps on the two windows. Paul Laterza, the school's chief custodian, said the clamps were put there about two years ago to keep the students from leaning on them and possibly falling out. He said they were only on the two hall windows on the second floor. Suffolk Police Commissioner John L. Barry and school board officials said they would investigate and to find out why the clamps were put on the windows. The school board officials also said they didn't know of the clamps.

State Director of Fire Safety George Proper Jr. flew to Suffolk from Albany last night. He must report to the State Education Department on the fire. He said he would be available to help local officials in their investigations.

Hassell suffered fractures of both kneecaps. He was reported in critical condition early today at Brookhaven Memorial Hospital. Also in critical condition were John Allers, 13, of 730 Bellport Ave., who suffered two broken ankles, internal injuries and smoke poisoning; and Deward Eades of 3 George Ct., Bellport, a teacher, who suffered a back injury.

As smoke began to pour through the building and through the heating ducts, persons in neighboring houses brought ladders and began to help students descend from the second-floor window. Witnesses said clouds of thick black smoke mushroomed from the south wing but there was no explosion. Teachers and passersby tried to catch the jumping students with blankets and their bare hands.

When Bellport firemen arrived, they began to slide the students down on a canvas chute. Most were suffering from smoke poisoning and were unconscious. Police and hospital officials reported that 52 students and Eades were treated at Brookhaven Memorial Hospital and at Bayview Community Hospital. Thirty-seven, including the teacher, were admitted.

2,500 Lend a Hand

An estimated 2,500 firemen and volunteers from at least 20 communities fought the blaze and aided in rescue operations. The fire was brought under control at 5:30 P.M. Equipment came from as far away as Westhampton Beach, Coram and Nesconset. Offers of assistance from Mayor Wagner and the New York City Police Department and Nassau County were declined.

Scores of doctors and nurses answered a call for volunteers and an emergency first-aid center was set up across from the school in the Valley National Bank. Bank personnel also pitched in. Students were strewn all over the school lawn when the first emergency units arrived. They had been evacuated from the second floor and were left there until help arrived. The bank also allowed rescued children to use its telephones to call their parents to tell them they were safe.

The Bellport School Board held an emergency meeting last night and announced that school would be closed Monday and probably most of the week. School officials estimated damage at \$1,000,000 and said the 34-year-old building was a total loss. A board spokesman said no plans were being made at this time to use churches and vacant buildings.



BREAKTHROUGH. Firemen scramble up ladder toward opening smashed in wall by crane's bucket, behind ladder on ground, at Bellport school fire yesterday. Opening enabled firemen to play hoses directly on blaze.

(Newsday Photo by Cavanagh)

Injured in School Fire

East Patchogue—The following is a list of the 37 hospitalized following yesterday's fire at Bellport High School. The list was compiled through reports from school, police and hospital officials.

In critical condition at Brookhaven Memorial Hospital early today were: John Allers, 13, of 730 Bellport Ave., Bellport, an eighth-grade student who suffered fractures of both ankles, internal injuries and smoke poisoning; and David Hassell, 17, of 196 S. Country Rd., Bellport, a 12th-grade student, who suffered fractures of both kneecaps. Deward Eades, of 3 George Ct., Bellport, a teacher who suffered a wrenched back is in fair condition.

Held overnight at the hospital for smoke poisoning, and reported in fair condition, were:

Willie Blackman, 15, Bourdois Avenue, Bellport; Joanne Buniski, 14, Stillwoods Road, Brookhaven; Kathy Chituck, 15, 217 Hedges Rd., East Patchogue; Diane Coyne, 15, 90 Clinton St., East Patchogue; John Euler, 13, Library Lane, Brookhaven; Linda Faro, 15, 930 Taylor Ave., Bellport; Harry Garrison, 16, 856 Taylor Ave., Bellport; Michael Goldbach, 15, 527 Mead Ave., Bellport; Mark Haneman, 15, 748 Walker Ave., Bellport; Richard Haynes, 16, 637 Bayview Ave., Bellport.

Also Linda Kern, 14, 34 Fuoco St., East Patchogue; Henry Kudinski, 15, Bellhaven Road, Bellport; Celeste Lento, 15, 143 Orchard Rd., East Patchogue; Joseph Leddy, 13, 756 Bourdois Ave., Bellport; Michele Maler, 16, 147 Patchogue Ave., East Patchogue; Robert Monohan, 12, 718 Hoffman Ave., Bellport; Marguerite Orenkowitz, 15 Edgar Avenue, Brookhaven; Susan Paisley, 13, 36 Thornhedge Rd., Bellport; Joe-Ann Picionne, 14, 721 Station Rd., Bellport.

Also Donna Ramirez, 14, 45 Circuit Rd., Bellport; Richard Reisinger, 13, 715 Narragansette Ave., East Patchogue; Jo-Ann Rich, 13, 92 Bay Rd., Brookhaven; Eileen Ryan, 13, 17 Bayview Ave., East Patchogue; Ernest Sills, 13, 726 Scherger Ave., East Patchogue; Ann Sperakis, 14, 25 S. Dunton Ave., East Patchogue; Kenneth Stuart, 14, 1 Thompson St., Bellport; Cheryl Switzer, 14, 716 Post Ave., Bellport; Barry Taylor, 13, 614 Clinton Ave., East Patchogue; Jose Torres, 13, 521 Donegan Ave., Bellport; Joan Townsend, 16, 68 George try Club Rd., Bellport; Richard Wittler, 13, 16 Colonial Dr., East Patchogue; Robin Young, 13, 316 Zipp Ave., East Patchogue; and Phyllis Zafrano, 15, 723 Doane Ave., North Bellport.

Fire 'Drill' Was the Real Thing

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help, I saw him go back into the smoke on the second floor to look for more."

Several of the children were rescued by Dr. Leigh L. Bell, a chiropractor who lives across the street from the school on Station Road. "My wife and I were in the kitchen eating when we heard the kids screaming, Bell said. "Some were jumping out the windows. I ran across and grabbed this small tree. A couple of other guys had arrived by that time and we shoved the tree up to a window. Some of the kids, boys and girls, scrambled down it."

Most off the injured were treated at Brookhaven Memorial Hospital, where parents waited for word on the condition of their children. Among those waiting was Mrs. E. Floyd Hassell, 196 S. Country Road, Bellport, a former volunteer at the hospital. Her son, David, 18, was one of the injured. "I'm fighting back the tears," she said.

As darkness fell, firemen still fought the flames. Some of the students, washed and calmed, stared at their gutted school. The glow of searchlights revealed deep circles beneath the eyes of one 13-year-old girl.

"We're lucky to be alive," she said to a friend.



(Newsday Aerial Photo by Sussman; Havecker, Pilot)

Aerial View Shows Smoke Billowing From Bellport School as Firemen Fight Blaze

37 Hurt in LI School Fire

Investigate Wires, Sealed Windows

Bellport—State officials joined Suffolk County police and the Bellport Fire Department today in a three-way investigation of a flash fire in the Bellport Junior-Senior High School yesterday during which 990 persons fled to safety. Thirty-seven persons were hospitalized, including three in critical condition, after escaping through flame and smoke—in some cases, by leaping from a second-story window.

Among questions that the probers hoped to be able to answer were:

- Why were two five-foot-tall windows clamped so they could be opened only about nine inches? During an apparent panic, students broke one of the second-story windows and six jumped out. Bellport firemen used the same window to rescue about 25 more youngsters, who were overcome by smoke and flames.

- Was faulty wiring, over the stage in the 30-year-old auditorium, responsible for the blaze? Firemen maintained that that was the cause, but Bellport Fire Chief Robert Terwilliger said it was impossible to pinpoint the cause at this time.

Principal Thomas Feeney said that most of the students were evacuated from both the new wing—which was protected from flames by steel fire doors—and the north wing of the old building in less than two minutes. "It is an absolute miracle that no one was burned to death," he said. "Another minute and there would have been great loss of life."

The fire was discovered at about 1:50 PM, 10 minutes before classes were to be dismissed for the day. Mary Serafino and Grace Snyder, both eighth graders, were taking a short cut through the empty auditorium when they noticed flames. They rushed to Feeney's office to report the fire. The principal ran to the auditorium and pulled a fire alarm when he felt blasts of heat and smoke. He and the janitor closed the fire doors between the five-year-old new wing to prevent the fire from spreading to that area.

The students and teachers in the new wing walked out to safety. The students on the ground floor of the old wing did likewise. Those on the second floor in the northern area of the old wing headed for the stairwells as they had been taught to do in fire drills. Some children reportedly tried the five-foot window at the top of the stairs, found it locked and they walked down the stairs to safety.

The students on the second floor in the south side also went to the stairwells. When they got there, however, gusts of smoke and

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(Newsday Photo by del Toro)

Students' Worried Parents Crowd Lobby of Brookhaven Hospital

Thought It Was a Drill, Then They Saw Smoke

Bellport—"First the bell rang, and we thought it was just a regular fire drill. Then, all at once, black smoke from the auditorium started coming in our room. The kids panicked and wouldn't go down the stairs. We ran to the window . . . A lot of kids couldn't breathe . . . We just wanted to get out . . . It was terrible. I jumped and landed on the lawn."

The trembling 15-year-old boy, his face ashen beneath black soot smears, told of what he had seen in the fire-swept Bellport Junior High School yesterday. As he talked, choking and gasping students lay on the school lawn around him. Others milled about aimlessly, sobbing and muttering the names of parents and classmates. Many of them had to squeeze through a broken window which had been shut by clamps. Blood smears from small hands framed the narrow, shattered second-story window.

In the crowds outside the police lines a woman implored: "Harold Miller — where is he? Where?" A minister knelt in deep mud to speak words of encouragement to a hysterical girl lying on a stretcher. Teachers, their jackets torn and blackened,

hurried to answer an anxious parent, to assist a student in shock. Across the street, in the Valley National Bank, bank personnel in white shirts streaked with blood and soot, helped weeping, bewildered students toward a battery of phones. "I'm all right, mom . . . I got out," they repeated.

When the fire broke out, Stephen Mennuti, 14, of 64 South Howells Point Rd., Bellport, was attending an English class on the first floor. "Everybody got up thinking it was routine when the gong went off," he said. "But I thought it was funny since we were getting out for the day in five or 10 minutes. Somebody said something funny like, 'Wouldn't it be funny if the school was on fire.' Then the teacher opened the door and it was."

"I'll never forget Mr. Richard Hall, my social studies teacher," said Mike Kalinowski, a 16-year-old sophomore. "He was fabulous, helping out those kids. He was a real hero. When he had no more to

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Newsday reporters who covered the Bellport Junior-Senior High School fire included: Art Bergmann, John Clark, Alan Eysen, Tony Schaeffer, Don Smith and George Usher. Photographers included: Jim Cavanaugh, Walter Del Toro, Rex Lyons, Marvin Sussman.

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