



MAKING A SPLASH

Queen Street retailer strikes gold with Bermuda flag swimwear

Lifestyle, page 27



TALE OF TWO KEEPERS

St George's could double up for this year's Cup Match classic

Sport, back page



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Today's High 83°F

Front Street in flames



Sarah Lagan
Adam Zacharias

A host of businesses were devastated yesterday as a giant fire swept through a three-storey building on Front Street.

Firefighters tackled huge flames amid thick black smoke for several hours after the blaze broke out at about 4.30am.

No one was injured but damage worth hundreds of thousands of dollars was caused to Onion Jack's, Chewstick, and about seven businesses under the umbrella of Queen Management Services. Fire crews remained vigilant last night as hotspots continued to flare up at the scene.

The return of trucks to Front Street prompted calls that the fire had rekindled, but a spokeswoman for the service said routine checks would continue until the ruins could be thoroughly soaked down.

Onion Jack's, which bore the brunt of the flames in the early part of the day, lost stock worth an estimated at \$300,000 while Bermuda Executive

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INSIDE Business owners 'devastated', pages 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 10

Photograph by Blaire Simmons

MUSTREADS

Fire costs for insurer

BF&M will pick up the tab for the fire that tore through a Front Street store and offices in the early hours of yesterday. But the insurer declined to speculate on the likely cost of the blaze, which virtually destroyed the building.

BUSINESS 13-17

Light bites, big city

Going on vacation does not mean you have to leave healthy eating habits at home, as our columnist Catherine Burns found on a trip to New York. Her tips include taking snacks and avoiding cocktails full of sugary mixers.

LIFESTYLE 27-34

Wells sidelined by injury

A recurring knee injury denied Nahki Wells the opportunity to test himself against Premier League side Liverpool in the Shankly Trophy match, in which Huddersfield Town suffered their first defeat of the preseason.

SPORT 47-52

Driver 'plotted for months'

The truck driver who killed 84 people on a Nice beachfront had accomplices and appears to have been plotting his attack for months, the Paris prosecutor said yesterday. Five suspects are in custody facing terrorism charges.

OVERSEAS 20-26



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INFERNO ON FRONT STREET

‘It was like a movie, it was surreal’

Continued from Page 1

Services, located above the tourist shop, fears it has lost “18 years of work”.

The fire brigade succeeded in preventing the blaze spreading to the Freisenbruch-Meyer Group building near by, but smoke damage was extensive in many businesses.

The cause of the fire was not established yesterday, and crews were continuing to assess structural damage late into the day, amid concerns they could collapse.

Sources also told *The Royal Gazette* that the fire service’s ladder truck had been long out of service, and that a host of other mechanical problems had grown into a longstanding source of frustration for firefighters.

At the scene yesterday morning, Onion Jack’s owner Richard Lines said the fire had become “a monster” by the time he reached Hamilton.

“I just felt overwhelmed. I didn’t know whether to scream or grab a fire extinguisher,” Mr Lines said. “I was dumbfounded. There were these big embers flying up it was like you were in a movie. It was surreal — unreal.”

Gavin Smith, the owner of Chewstick, which moved into its premises only last year, was equally dismayed at the loss of cultural artefacts and historical archives that had been donated to the charity.

Speaking after the blaze had been brought under control, assistant chief fire officer Dana Lovell told this newspaper: “There was a major structural fire in Hamilton at 75 and 77 Front Street, the buildings that house Onion Jack and Chewstick.

“There have been no injuries to any firefighters; they are quite exhausted. We have not been able to provide a preliminary cause of fire — assistant chief fire officer Dana Lovell

“The seat of the fire extended throughout the structure of the Onion Jack’s building, totally destroying it.

“I can confirm there have been no injuries to any firefighters; at this time they are quite exhausted.

“But we are pleased to say they are safe. We have not been able to provide a preliminary cause of fire. There has been significant heat and smoke damage to the surrounding buildings.”

Asked whether the structures could collapse, Mr Lovell said: “There is always that concern, certainly with the casualty building.”

Sixteen vehicles and more than 30 fire personnel tackled the fire throughout the day.

They used two handheld hoses to shoot water into the ground floor, with vehicle-mounted hoses for the upper floors.

Their efforts were temporarily assisted by heavy rainfall from a thunderstorm that began at about 7am. By 7.30am the heavy rainfall had subsided, and the fire service continued to tackle the blaze using seawater pumped from the ocean.

It took until midafternoon for the area to be deemed safe enough for Front Street to re-open to traffic.

Dozens of people watched the drama unfold early in the morning. They included Patrick Outerbridge, the customer liaison manager and building manager at Freisenbruch-Meyer, who was going for a run when he was stopped by an acquaintance and informed of the fire.

“I sprinted down here,” he said.

Referring to the Onion Jack’s building, Mr Outerbridge said: “It’s old wood in an old building. Wooden floors, wooden stairwells: it’s like stepping back in time.

“They said that the flames were getting in the back of our second and third floor, and there’s a lot of smoke damage.

“It’s really shocking. We’re just hoping that we don’t have that much damage, but the amount of smoke will be a problem. It’s our filing room, our servers.”

William Madeiros, the executive vice-president of Freisenbruch-Meyer, said: “The good

news is that our team is safe, our data and our clients’ data and records are safe, and we’re going to do the best we can to get up and running as quickly as possible.

“We’re very anxious to get back in our building, and we have a disaster recovery plan.”

Senator Jeff Baron, the Minister of National Security, told *The Royal Gazette*: “We are re-

mindful of the dedication, hard work and bravery of the men and women of the Bermuda Fire Service who attended the scene and contained the fire.

“Obviously, there was major disruption to traffic and people going about their daily lives.

“It is really tragic and my heart goes out to the business owners. Many of us patronise

their businesses to buy Bermudian and experience Bermudian culture. My heart goes out to them and I hope that, with the help of the community, they will see a rise and return to their businesses as quickly as possible.”

Photograph by Akil Simmons
“Monster” blaze: flames rise from the top of the building



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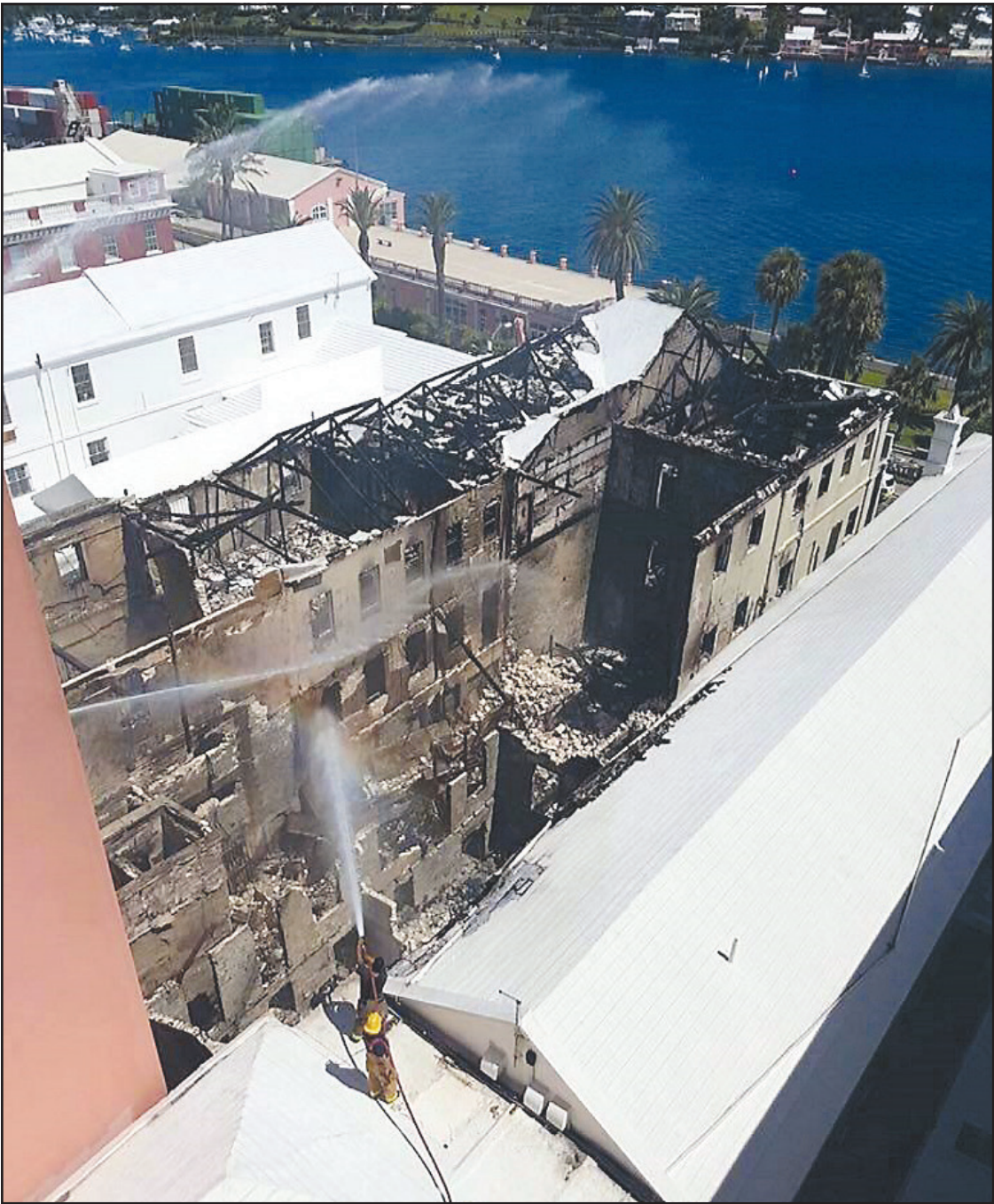
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INFERNO ON FRONT STREET



Ravaged by flame: this overhead shot shows the extent of damage to the building. Right, smouldering wood, ash and debris among piles of rubble and puddles of water from the hoses

Blaze ‘devastating’ to witness

Adam Zacharias

An apocalyptic atmosphere shrouded Front Street early yesterday as heavy rain and booming thunderclaps punctuated a formidable inferno.

Business owners and employees looked on in horror as the blaze tore through multiple venues, while fire-fighters battled to bring it under control.

Richard Lines, the owner of tourist store Onion Jack’s, said he was “dumb-founded” to see his shop go up in flames, adding that the “surreal” situation felt like something from a film.

Bill Zuill, a director at Bermuda Executive Services, stood behind the police barrier surveying the scene as it unfolded.

“It’s devastating to watch. That’s 18 years of work, everything is in that building,” he said.

Gavin Smith, founder and executive director of the Chewstick arts charity, described the scene as “heartbreaking”, after his site succumbed to both fire and water damage.

As firefighters battled the inferno into the afternoon, a steady stream of onlookers came and went — from cyclists at daybreak to the crew of a container ship, which stopped to rubberneck before continuing its ocean journey.

Despite the sombre nature of the incident, those affected tried to remain in positive spirits, sharing breakfast and coffee with emergency services and



Cannot hide the heartache: Gavin Smith, of Chewstick, holds the charred remains of a guitar.



Photograph left by Akil Simmons; right by Sarah Lagan

other involved parties. Not all were so stoic, however, as tempers occasionally frayed among commuters attempting to enter Hamilton to begin their working day.

Spurling Hill was one of numerous areas to endure gridlocked traffic — as just one car at a time edged through the traffic lights each time they turned green.

With sections of Front Street and

“We are heartened by the amazing support we have from the community and the number of people who have come forward and offered to help

— Dawn Zuill, business owner

Reid Street closed for the morning, some aggrieved residents took to arguing with law enforcement as they attempted to access cordoned-off areas.

But while the fire inconvenienced many for one morning, it has turned the lives of an unfortunate few upside-down. Their rebuilding process starts now.

As Dawn Zuill, the owner of Queen Management Services, reflected last

night, the support of the community has already proved crucial.

“We are heartened by the amazing support that we have from the community and the number of people who have come forward and offered to help,” Mrs Zuill said.

“We are also grateful to our staff for stepping up and continuing to provide quality service to all our clients and customers. It’s been absolutely amazing.”

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