

Arson suspected in fire at Bijou Center in South Lake Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

Fire officials are calling an early morning fire at the Bijou Center in South Lake Tahoe arson.

Ray Zachau, fire marshal for the city, told *Lake Tahoe News*, "It was definitely a deliberate act."

The cause is not being released. He and other officials were still at the scene at 3:30pm – about 12 hours after the 911 call was made.

Employees of Tahoe Wellness Collective alerted officials to the fire, but no one at the dispensary Thursday afternoon had been there during the fire so no one would comment.

Liz Hallen, who owns Hot Gossip in the center, said she was alerted about the fire from her employee who was trying to open the coffee shop at 7am. Police told her it was a crime scene and the opening would be delayed. (She eventually opened at 8:30am.)

The fire started on the exterior of La Promesa, four doors from Hot Gossip.

Josy Garnillo, owner of the bakery, said officers came to her house about 5am. She didn't answer because she was sleeping. She wasn't aware of the fire until arriving at work Thursday at 9am.

"Water did come inside the building," Garnillo said. That was all cleaned up in time for La Promesa to open at its regular time of 10am.

Zachau said the four sprinklers that went off helped save the building.

Hallen said the sprinklers were not going to put out the fire, which is why she's glad people work late at the marijuana collective.

"We were lucky they were here, otherwise the building would have burned down," Hallen said.

An estimate on the dollar value of the damage won't be available until at least Friday. All businesses were open Thursday – some just opened later than usual.

Zachau said as of late Thursday afternoon no arrests had been made, but officials want to question some possible suspects.