

Franklin County Citizen Leader

SERVING ROYSTON, LAVONIA, FRANKLIN SPRINGS, CANON, CARNESVILLE AND SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES



An early morning fire Saturday destroyed the Dill's Food City location in Royston. (Photo courtesy of the Royston Police Department)

'Resurrection and rebuild'

Fire destroys Royston Dill's

By SHANE SCOGGINS
PUBLISHER

ROYSTON – Dill's Food City burned down Saturday morning.

The Royston Fire Department responded to the grocery store around 12:15 a.m., Chief Matt Elrod said.

When firefighters arrived, flames were already coming out of the roof of the back of the building behind where the produce section was located, Elrod said.

The roof in that area was

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Dilworth family making plans for 'newer, better facilities'

By SHANE SCOGGINS
PUBLISHER

ROYSTON – The Dilworth family plans a "resurrection and rebuild" of the Royston Dill's Food

City destroyed by fire over the weekend with "newer, better facilities."

"There is no question that is our goal and the plans," Tracy Dilworth, a member of the family that

owns Dill's in Royston and Lavonia, said.

The store was destroyed by a fire early

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A photo from a drone shows fire trucks from multiple departments from Franklin, Hart, Madison and Elbert counties dump nearly two million gallons of water to fight the fire that destroyed Dill's Food City Saturday. (Photo courtesy of the Royston Fire Department)

Fire: Dill's in Royston burns down Saturday

falling in at that time.

The fire spread quickly after that, he said.

A call went out to all Franklin County fire departments and departments in Hart, Elbert and Madison counties, the chief said.

The other departments responded with manpower and to transport water to the scene.

By 6:30 a.m., 1.3 million gallons of water had been sprayed on the fire, Elrod said.

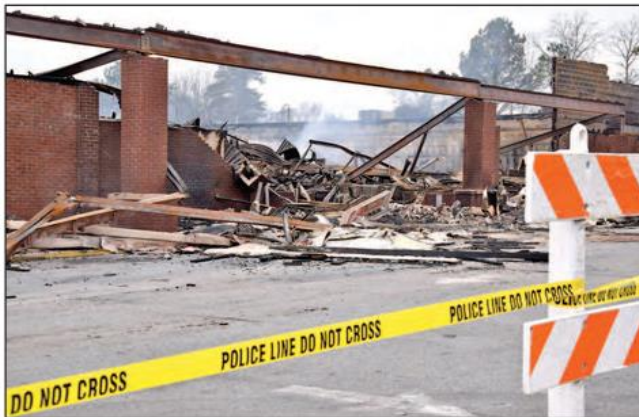
"That would have never been possible without all the area fire departments shuttling water," he said.

It took firefighters five-and-a-half hours to get it under control.

The Royston and Franklin Springs departments were on scene until around 10 a.m. Saturday, when Bold Springs Fire sent firefighters in relief.

No firefighters were injured, Elrod said, though one fireman was treated for smoke inhalation at the scene and released.

Tracy Dilworth, whose family owns Dill's, said he was thankful for the "heroic" efforts of the firefighters, who contained the fire to the grocery



The Dill's Food City in Royston was left in ruins after an early Saturday morning fire destroyed the store. (Photo by Scoggins)

store.

"They literally kept it totally contained," he said.

Dilworth said it was amazing to see the fire departments work together to get water to the fire.

Over the weekend, firefighters returned to the scene three times to deal with hot spots in the wreckage of the store.

A fire investigator visited the scene over the weekend and is scheduled

to return, Elrod said.

It appears the fire started in an area that housed coolers in the back of the building, the chief said.

Elrod said that neighboring businesses Savannah Valley Carpets, Tri-County Sports/Graphics, Family Dollar and El Manzanillo suffered possible water and/or smoke damage.

Savannah Valley and Tri-County will have to have structural inspec-

tions done of walls they shared with Dill's, and El Manzanillo will have to have a health inspection as well, Elrod said.

Dilworth said the only thing not destroyed was an outside freezer that the business added just a few years ago. All of its product, shelving, refrigerators and other equipment – as well as some business memorabilia – was destroyed, Dilworth said.

Rebuild: Owners plans 'newer, better' store

Saturday morning (see related story).

"Certainly, it's like losing your best friend," Dilworth said. "My brother [Stan] and I, there's no building we've spent more time in, including our homes."

Dill's had been at the same location since 1970, though the building had been expanded several times since.

The business started in 1935 in Red Hill and opened its first Royston store in 1955.

Currently, the business is waiting on fire investigators and its insurance agency to release the scene for clean up.

Dilworth said a fence has been put up at the location for security, and clean up crews are on stand-by when they are given the go-ahead to do so.

"We're sitting here at the start line just ready to fire our engines and proceed with cleanup," Dilworth said.

At the time of the fire, discussions were ongoing about a remodel of the Royston store similar to one done in Lavonia five years ago.

That experience in Lavonia will serve the business well as it makes its plans for a new store, Dilworth said.

Dill's has moved the Royston employees that want to keep their positions to the Lavonia store.

"We're basically putting our two teams together to create a super Dill's team," Dilworth said.

The goal is to improve service and "take it up a notch" at Lavonia.

The Lavonia store has also increased its supply in anticipation of customers of the Royston store who will now travel to the Lavonia location, Dilworth said.

Taking care of the employees – who Dilworth called the "Dill's Family" – was job one.

In addition to mov-

ing employees to work in Lavonia, other grocery stores have offered positions, he said.

Royston Mayor Keith Turman urged citizens to pray for the Dilworths and give them support during this time.

"It's time that the community rally and support the Dilworth family," Royston Mayor Keith Turman said.

Dilworth said that he, Stan and their wives Lisa and Karen, have felt that support.

"We can't take two steps without someone coming up and consoling and giving words of encouragement," he said, adding that the response of the community has been "overwhelming" and "genuine."

Dilworth said his parents, Anderson and Joel, were upset by the news but are resilient.

His father's motto has always been "leave everything better than you find it," which Tracy said he and Stan have continued as the business model.

The fire was a blow to Royston, Turman said, but he said the city is resilient. It will be tough, but Royston will get through it, he said.

Royston is ready to help the Dilworth's plans in any way legally possible, he said.

Turman said that Royston has had some setbacks, but he is optimistic.

The city has suffered two major fires – one downtown and the one at Dill's – in the past few years.

The city is looking at ways to improve its water system to have better fire protection available. Work on the city's water plant that is already in the process is part of that, he said.

"I believe there's going to be a rebuild that's better than ever," he said. "We're gonna win here in Royston."