

FRANKLIN FOODS



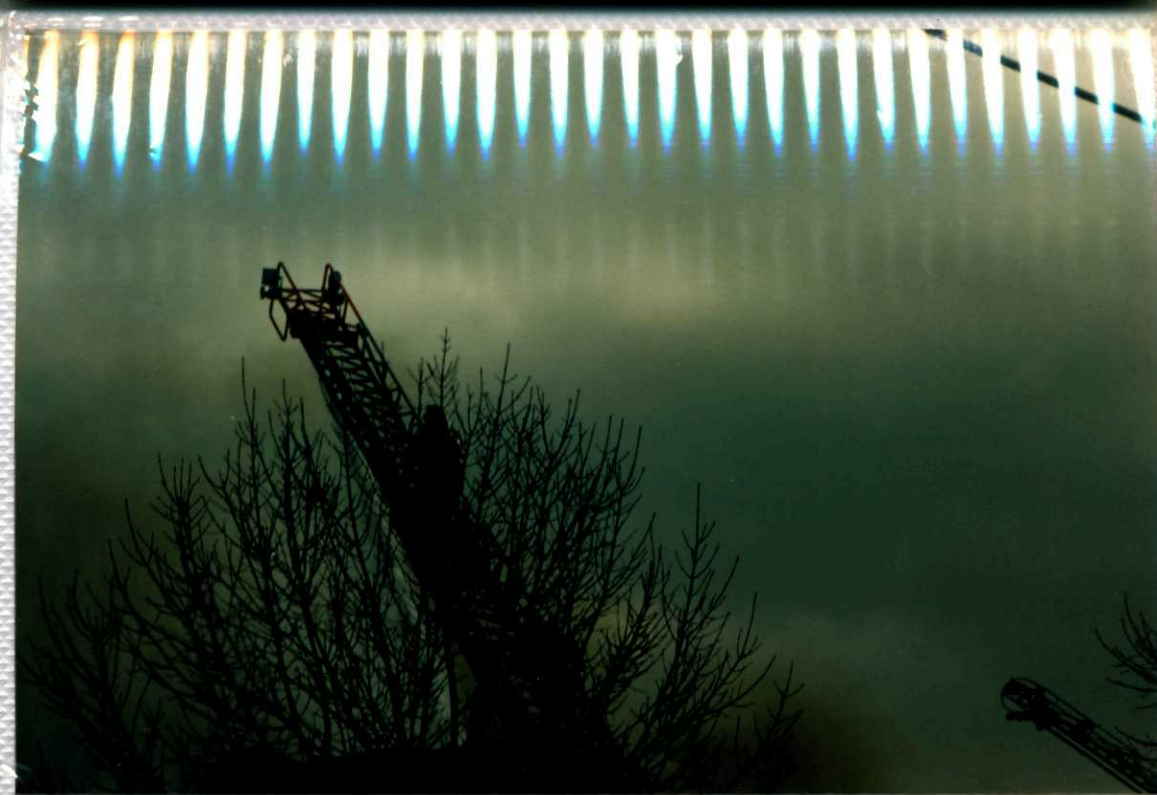
































Future of grocery unclear after fire

Friends, customers offer help in cleanup

BY RUSSELL LISSAU
Daily Herald Staff Writer

The owners of a family-run Wheeling supermarket that was destroyed by fire said Sunday they are not sure whether they will try to reopen the store elsewhere.

Elaine Kumkoski, who ran Franklin Finer Foods at Dundee Road and Milwaukee Avenue with her husband, son and daughter, said she and her family are still numb about the blaze.

"It was just such a shock," Kumkoski said. "But we've still got our family — we've still got each other."

The fire apparently started about 9:30 a.m. Friday when a stack of plastic foam boxes in the meat department hit a ceiling light fixture and sparked, witnesses said, but Wheeling fire officials said Sunday they had not yet determined the cause.

Firefighters from 19 departments assisted in battling the

blaze and preventing it from spreading to other stores in the shopping center.

One store employee was treated for smoke inhalation, fire officials said, but no one was seriously injured.

Wheeling fire officials said the store is a total loss. Damage is estimated at \$750,000. The Kumkoskis leased the building.

Although members of the Niles family have not yet been allowed to enter the remains of the store and survey the damage for themselves, many friends and customers have offered to aid in the cleanup of the store, Kumkoski said.

She attributes their helpfulness to the close relationships the Kumkoskis shared with many of their customers in the five years they owned the store.

"We got to know a lot of them as friends," she said. "It was different than shopping at Jewel or Dominick's. The big stores just don't have that personal touch."