



A 47-year-old developmentally disabled man was charged with arson last week in connection with a Nov. 16 fire at his group home.

Five people were injured in the fire, one critically, that started in a second-floor sitting room around 3 a.m.

Lancaster County Attorney Gary Lacey filed first-degree arson charges against Bobby Ray Easterwood for starting the fire in the 5746 Ballard St. group home.

Seven residents and four staff members lived in the home run by Developmental Services of

Nebraska. Easterwood, who has a history of setting fires, is believed to have started the blaze in his closet, fire officials said.

Easterwood appeared to have been upset that night because he could not watch a television program.

Damage to the home and contents was estimated at \$70,000.

If convicted, Easterwood could be sentenced to one to 50 years in prison.

Compiled by senior staff writer
Josh Funk

Three boys barely escape fire in shed

■ The blaze began when children were playing with paper and fire, eventually causing \$3,000 damage.

BY JOSH FUNK
Senior staff writer

Three boys playing with fire in a small shed Friday afternoon narrowly escaped smoke and flames by punching a hole in the roof.

"They were very fortunate that they were able to get out," Deputy Fire Chief Jerry Greenfield said.

The fire, which started while the boys were burning paper with a lighter, destroyed the west half of the shed behind the house at 1747 S. 16th St., causing \$3,000 damage.

The shed was a 6-foot-tall, add-on structure built behind the original garage.

To enter the shed, the boys had to work together to pry open the door. But after the fire started, they could not easily escape.

The boys, 8- and 9-year-old brothers who live in the house and a 9-year-old friend, thought they had stamped out the fire in the pile of leaves and papers, until the smoke started to build.

As the fire grew and the smoke thickened, the boys could not get out of the shed. They stood on a chair and used a hoe to punch a hole in the roof and climb out.

The three told investigators they ran to a friend's house more than a mile away after escaping the blaze.

A neighbor saw smoke coming from the garage and called authorities, and another resident had seen the boys running from the garage about 15 minutes earlier, Fire Investigator Chuck Schweitzer said.

The boys were referred to police and will go through an educational program offered by the Bureau of Fire Prevention.

"All it takes is one match," Schweitzer said. "And these kids found out ... that it takes one stroke of a lighter to almost kill you."

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

University Police search for campus scam artist

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to get him the cash before dropping Finney off at his car.

Finney always exchanges phone numbers with his victims, though he uses a fake phone number.

"Don't give into this guy because you'll be out the money," Bushing said.

On Nov. 22, Finney actually called the victim later that night asking for more money for a hotel room. The victim refused and called police. The Nov. 2 victim saw Finney

drive away in his supposedly broken-down car after giving him the money.

Finney is described as a black man, 6 feet tall, 180 pounds and wearing round, gold-rimmed glasses.

Finney has a history of small-time scams like these, especially on campus.

Police were still looking for Finney on Sunday, but Bushing said they had a good idea of where to find him.

"People need to get better information before giving. Ask for a photo ID if they are approached."

Greeks examine gay policies

GAY from page 1

close friends as early as her junior year.

"I didn't really ever completely come out while I was an undergraduate," she said. "Being in a sorority house, that gets kind of difficult."

Because the 40-member chapter was entirely women, who shared bathrooms and sleeping quarters, Young didn't think fellow members would feel comfortable knowing she was a lesbian.

"Although I knew that I wasn't a predator, I was afraid if I came out, other people would think I was," Young said.

That was one of the most prevalent stereotypes of gays and lesbians, she said.

Rumors that Young was a lesbian spread. When that happened, some of her friends were "very protective" of her, she said.

But not everyone was so open to the idea. "Some people had the tendency to want to distance themselves from me."

Years ago, UNL had a similar situation when a gay member of Acacia Fraternity inadvertently came out.

In 1993 the member was seen in a photograph at National Coming Out Day in front of the Nebraska Union wearing an Acacia sweatshirt, said Andrew Muller, a senior political science major and former Acacia member.

Muller said, Acacia members were distressed about the house's reputation being damaged.

Other fraternities have mocked Acacia, calling it "A-gay-cia" and joking about its members, Muller said. He said fraternities like to give nicknames to others, and that was the one that has stuck with Acacia.

According to Case's national survey, a majority of gay, lesbian or bisexual members received a "relatively supportive response from the majority of their members" when they voluntarily revealed their sexual orientation.

The likelihood gay or lesbian members would be treated poorly - be ignored, teased or forced to leave the house - increased when members discover on their own that someone is gay, lesbian or bisexual.

With that type of case at Acacia, Muller said the brothers had mixed reactions to the gay member, some positive and some negative, but he wouldn't elaborate on the negative.

The member ended up moving out of the house, he said.

However, a majority of lesbian, gay or bisexual members stay in the closet while in college. But about 40 percent voluntarily came out to one or more non-gay members, and less than 10 percent voluntarily came out to the entire chapter, according to Case's study.

If a sister came out while in Kappa Alpha Theta Sorority, members would be accepting, President Carolyn Armstrong said.

Conversely, Alpha Xi Delta Sorority President Courtney Johnson said negative responses may be because many members at UNL may not have had exposure to gays and lesbians. Johnson said coming from western Nebraska, she hadn't "dealt with it."

Historically, members of the greek system from anywhere haven't been confronted with that, said Sigma Nu Fraternity members Bill Dixon and John Oswald.

But a new book shows that for decades people have been coming out or keeping their sexual preference in while in a greek house. The book, "Out on Fraternity Row: Personal Accounts of Being Gay in a College Fraternity," is a collection of first-person essays by 30 gay men who joined traditional fraternities in college.

Case's survey also included narratives that elaborated on gay and lesbian respondents' experiences.

A 1993 graduate from the University of Wyoming said: "I have managed to change quite a few of my brothers' ideas about gays. ... (One member) recently admitted that he had quite a few reservations about my joining the fraternity. He said he used to think of gays as being subhuman."

Open rushing

Sexual orientation may play a part in whether someone is accepted into a house if it is known a rushee is gay, some said.

However, quality is supposed to be what fraternity and sorority members look for, said Tom Scott, a member of Fiji - Phi Gamma Delta Fraternity.

"Sexual orientation has nothing to do with it," Scott said. "We're going to pick up the best men that have the best resumes sent to us."

But a fellow Fiji member thought otherwise.

"I kind of disagree. I just can't see it being very accepting," Jason Jacobi said. "Someone comes through rush and says, 'Oh by the way, I'm gay.' I don't think a house is going to sign them."

Beta Theta Pi member Greg Brockmeier agreed.

"I seriously think that if

I seriously think that if someone was openly gay and going through rush that houses wouldn't look at them."

-Greg Brockmeier
Beta Theta Pi member

someone was openly gay and going through rush that houses wouldn't look at them," Brockmeier said. "It's a step that hasn't been taken as of yet. It's sad that someone would have their backs turned on them, but it happens."

Kappa Alpha Theta's Armstrong said she couldn't foresee sexual orientation affecting the acceptance of an openly lesbian rushee.

"I would hope not," she said bluntly. Though all greek houses have non-discrimination policies, they don't always address sexual preference.

Alpha Xi Delta Sorority's position statement on discrimination reads: "Alpha Xi Delta ... believes it is inherent in our principles not to discriminate on the basis of race, religion, national origin, handicap or age."

"I notice it doesn't address the issues as far as sexual preference," Johnson said.

The statement continues: "Be it resolved, that there are no discriminatory requirements imposed upon any chapter or colony ..."

Young said sororities and fraternities are more free to discriminate than individuals in other groups on campus.

"I'm trying to imagine the residents of Abel Hall voting on whether or not someone gets to live in the dorm," Young said. "It doesn't happen that way."

However, because of stereotypes of greek living, some UNL greek members didn't think gays or lesbians would feel comfortable in a house.

Greek houses are seen as being heterosexual. For example, in one UNL fraternity house, a naked picture of actress Jennifer Aniston serves as one of the computer's screen savers in the house computer lab.

Some say the system is centered on social interaction with the opposite sex and that the system itself is elitist and not open to any minorities.

"I can see how that would scare off some people," said John Rice, member of Phi Kappa Psi Fraternity.

Fiji member J.B. Goll put the situation in the context of the psychological hierarchy of needs, the basis of which is the need for acceptance.

"It's not like we don't want them to be around or anything," Goll said. "But I don't think they'd have a feeling of being accepted here."

Johnson said if prospective lesbian members were comfortable with join-

ing a sorority, such as Alpha Xi Delta, they should.

"I think it'd be up to them," Johnson said.

Johnson would not directly say whether a lesbian rushee would be accepted into her house. She said it would be difficult to say whether the house would accept one because it has never been an issue.

Brockmeier said it was important to make a gay or lesbian person feel welcome, but that members must understand heterosexuals' needs as well.

"I think a homosexual might feel uneasy, or especially a male homosexual, in being in a greek house," Brockmeier said. "They'd feel uneasy. But if they could get past that, they could understand these guys are in their sexual prime."

"I think it wouldn't be a bad environment."

Ryan Stowe, Delta Tau Delta Fraternity president, said potential members need to look at the actual membership and goals of greek houses to overcome those stereotypes.

The greek system was becoming more academically based than social, he said, and members were trying more to include minorities, which Stowe said should include gay members.

Safe houses

Oswald said his fraternity, Sigma Nu, hasn't actively recruited from the gay population. Rice said the same of Phi Kappa Psi, and so did others.

Having someone come out in a house would be good for a house because it would give house members exposure to a different type of lifestyle, which could lead to increased acceptance, Sigma Nu members said.

"I would love for that to happen," said Dixon, former Sigma Nu president.

And just as members of the greek system say they are trying to reach out more to the gay and lesbian population, those outside of the system are trying to reach into it.

Allies, a campus group, has been looking at ways to confront homophobia within the greek system.

Last year the group led a campaign to encourage houses to become Allies, or safe houses. In doing so, a house would let others know it provides a safe environment for gays, lesbians and bisexuals.

Kappa Alpha Theta, which has been an Allies house for about two years, is so far the only house to take that step.

Armstrong, the house's president, said that when the house voted on becoming a safe house, there was no conflicting opinions.

She didn't realize no other houses elected to become safe houses and was surprised.

"I don't think there's a reason not to become one," Armstrong said.

Jill Matlock, Allies president, said she was happy Kappa Alpha Theta did become a safe house but said she hoped the group's spring campaign would be more successful.

Muller, the former Acacia member, said that when he lived in the house he tried to put an Allies sticker on his door, indicating his room was a safe space.

"Within a day it was completely ripped down and defaced," Muller said. Such homophobia exists throughout the greek system, not just in Acacia, he said.

Matlock said the effort to make safe houses was to help defeat attitudes within and outside of chapters that they are not open to gays.

"It's just a shame the greek system has such a stereotype," Matlock said.

The group is also trying to diversify itself, getting more greek members involved.

Beta Theta Pi President Mattox said there has been some talk of increasing diversity within his house and accepting gay members.

Others in UNL greek houses said the same.

But Muller said houses have not done enough to combat homophobia. He said that was one of the few things he really disliked about the system.

"Homophobia in the greek system is just rampant."

Daily Nebraskan

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The Daily Nebraskan (USPS 144-080) is published by the UNL Publications Board, Nebraska Union 34, 1400 R St., Lincoln, NE 68588-0448, Monday through Friday during the academic year; weekly during the summer sessions. The public has access to the Publications Board. Readers are encouraged to submit story ideas and comments to the Daily Nebraskan by calling (402) 472-2588.

Subscriptions are \$55 for one year.

Postmaster: Send address changes to the Daily Nebraskan, Nebraska Union 34, 1400 R St., Lincoln NE 68588-0448. Periodical postage paid at Lincoln, NE.

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