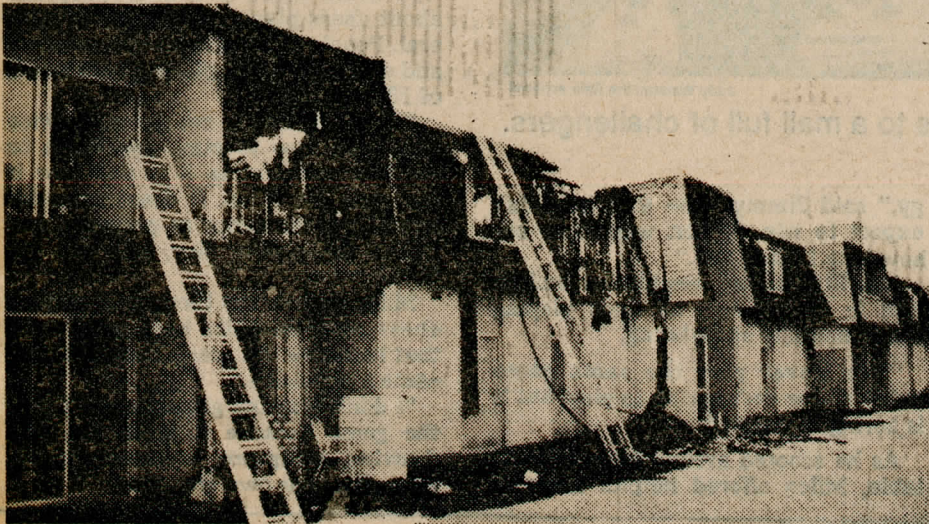


Marilyn Kleator/the little sentinel

Dianne Storman sweeps up as a firefighter surveys damage.



Cigarette blamed for fire in Frenchman's Cove unit

By SHARON CARRASCO
the little sentinel

Fire apparently started by a cigarette gutted a Winter Park apartment early last Friday and caused damage estimated at \$115,000 to \$125,000, Winter Park Fire Marshal Jim Humphrey said.

Willard Gonzales' apartment was destroyed and seven others in the 30-unit Frenchman's Cove complex suffered smoke or water damage, said Fire Chief Sid Ballou, who said fire walls restricted the blaze from spreading.

Firefighters were called to the complex about 2:39 a.m. and escorted residents from smoke-filled corridors and stairwells before "serious firefighting" began, Ballou said.

Diane Storman, a five-year resident of the complex, said she was awakened about 2:35 a.m. by people in the hallway yelling "Fire!" and pounding on her front door.

"The firemen knocked down my sliding glass door to get in," she said.

Tony Brocato said he and his wife were awakened by the screams of their next-door neighbor.

"The lady was getting ready to jump off the balcony," said Brocato, an in-

surance agent. "She couldn't get out her front door. There was too much smoke."

Brocato, whose front door is on the other side of a fire wall, helped the woman climb over to his balcony. All three escaped, along with the Brocatos' dog.

Police officer Terry Price and Gonzales, who fire officials believe accidentally started the fire while smoking in bed, were later treated at hospitals for smoke inhalation.

Gonzales left the front door and windows open when he fled his apartment, Humphrey said, allowing drafts to suck flames through his apartment and into the corridor.

Humphrey called a press conference later Friday to deny residents' charges that an extension cord running from Gonzales' apartment to a corridor wall socket started the fire. No extension cord was found, but Gonzales' electricity had been turned off, he said.

Some residents said the fire alarm on the second floor never sounded, but Humphrey and other occupants of the building said the alarm system was in good working order.

FIRE DEPT.