

# Inglewood fire threatens to put dent in retailing

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By SARAH GAULT

THE Inglewood fire will knock back an already sluggish local economy, say some Rata St retailers.

They are worried about the black hole that will be left if the building is demolished.

"It's a bit of a disaster really," said Brian McGregor yesterday, owner of McGregor Electrical Services.

"With the way business is around Inglewood, having a big, black hole in town isn't going to help.

Moa Books owner Ray Waldvogel said the fire would have a noticeable impact. "We had a few empty buildings already which has made business difficult. Now we could have an empty hole."

"The people in the dairy had done a lot of work in refurbishing it and it was looking real nice," said Mr Waldvogel, referring to Len's Place Dairy and Tearooms, the shop in which the fire started.

Yesterday, shops on the same side as Len's Place were without phone or Eftpos lines. Two nearby businesses, Bearin' Gifts, which is relocating to New Plymouth, and Wayne Herbert's furniture restoration, received smoke damage.

Trevor Mackay, owner of Grandma's Hot Bread Shop, said January was quiet in the township and a fire-damaged building or demolition site would not help.

"I would say over the next three or four months it could get pretty hard for businesses around here."

But the opening of the Fun Ho Toy Museum in the former post office on

Rata Street could attract more visitors and boost business, he said.

The museum, bought last year by the Inglewood Development Trust, hopes to open in several months.

Inglewood district councillor Heather Dodunski, said the loss of a local business and a landmark building would be sorely felt.

"Certainly, it's going to leave a huge gap.

"As much as you would like to be positive about any rebuilding, it seems we are losing a number of retailers, which is a worry."

But if the building, which was divided in two by a fire wall, was pulled down, a village green could be built in its place, she said.

"Perhaps it's time for the council to be pro-active and look at a different aspect for the street — we could have a nice green area."

Brett Muir, of Inglewood marketing and promotion group Crossroads Promotions, said the fire was a setback for the town.

"This was part of the local identity."

Crossroads Promotions had hoped to see the building painted in heritage colours and had organised quotes for its owners to consider. "We were waiting to hear back from them. In the interim, the buildings had been put on the market."

However, he remained optimistic about the future of the central business district, saying antique, craft and curio shops would sit nicely with existing businesses.

"I think there's a lot of untapped potential."



ABOVE: At 2.45am, New Plymouth's chief fire officer, Allen Pidwell, shares his relief that there is no one in the building.

RIGHT: Firefighters wearing breathing apparatus try unsuccessfully to enter the back of the flat on the top story of Len's Place to check whether tenants have been caught inside. The building owners were later tracked down and confirmed the flat was not let.

LOWER RIGHT: Firefighters set out breathing apparatus on the main street of Inglewood about 1.30am yesterday as they prepare to enter the building to determine whether anyone is trapped inside.

BELOW: About 2.30am. Large groups of Inglewood residents gather to watch the fight to save the town. In the background a firefighter on the hydraulic platform uses a hose to aim water directly at the seat of the blaze. The roof of the building has already collapsed.

Photos: ADRIAN MALLOCH



But the opening of the Full 100 Toy  
Museum in the former post office on potential."

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