Police say they now believe fire was arson

Nancy El-Shamma
Index Staff

Police investigators now believe that the fire which broke out in the room of a first-year student in Trowbridge Hall after a racial hate letter was posted on his door did not begin by accident.

Sargent Lee, acting for Detective lieutenant Jerome Bryant, who is in charge of the case, said that evidence indicates that the fire was definitely started intentionally.

Lee also said that an active investigation into the crime is currently taking place and that the Kalamazoo Department of Public Safety is conducting interviews on campus and among the student body on a regular basis.

As of now, there are no suspects.

The department was on campus last Thursday to survey those students who could provide any information. According to Lee, this case is particularly lengthy because so many people had access to Trowbridge that it is nearly impossible to pick out suspects.

This bed from Trowbridge Hall shows the effects of the devastating fire which destroyed the room of two students.

The room the fire started in was not to be here right now if it were not for the incredibly supportive response of the student body.

He said he tries to keep the crime at the back of his mind these days and not think about it. "Sometimes I think about what happened and I get real sad. Sometimes I feel great, like everybody is standing behind me and other times I feel like crap, like I can't trust anybody," he said. "I hate feeling like that, like I don't know who to trust."

He said that his first reaction after the note and the fire were feelings of betrayal. "I thought Kalamazoo College was the place for me and I just got stabbed in the back," he said.

Lee was disappointed to find out that the fire was intentionally started because he did not want to think of the worst of people. "When the perpetrator is caught, he said he will be happy and sad because it will be over but the main problem is ignorance."

He said that ignorance is what caused the crime and that he feels sorry for those responsible.

People treat him differently now, he said. "It is even worse. I am glad. Some people treat me better than they did and some treat me worse."

A reward of $4,000 is available for information which leads to the arrest of those responsible for the fire and hate letter. The College has offered $2,000 and the Silent Observer Program has contributed $1,000. An additional $1,000 was added to the reward by an anonymous friend of the College. Those with information about the incident should call the Silent Observer Program at 343-2100.