

Inspection Services
P. Samuel Hoffses
Chief



Planning and Urban Development
Joseph E. Gray Jr.
Director

CITY OF PORTLAND

109-B-A-009
Roger Berle
c/o Finestkind
6 Island Avenue
Cliff Island, ME 04109

May 1, 1996

RE: 109B-A-009 Island Avenue, Cliff Island

Dear Mr. Berle,

It was my understanding when you met with Sam Hoffses and me, that you would be immediately ceasing any storage and building activities that you were conducting on your neighbor Tom Wright's property. It has recently come to our attention that you are still conducting your business activities at this site. It will be necessary to cease all your business activities at this site immediately. Our Code Enforcement Officer will be making a reinspection of this site in the near future. I expect this activity to cease 10 days after the receipt of this letter.

It is also my understanding that it was not until just recently that you have looked into proceeding further with a contract zone in order to legalize your business on your own property. I encourage you to follow thru in a timely manner, or our office will be forced to take legal action.

If you have any questions regarding this matter, please do not hesitate to contact this office.

Sincerely,

Marge Schmuckal
Zoning Administrator

cc to: Tom Wright, Cliff Island
Joseph Gray, Jr., Director of Planning and Urban Dev.
P. Samuel Hoffses, Chief of Inspection Services
Arthur Rowe, Code Enforcement Officer
George Flaherty, Islands Liaison Person

*Scheduled for workshop
June 11, 1996 3:30
Rm 209
within 500'*

Application for a Contract Zone

To: The Portland Planning Board

From: Roger Berle, President, Finestkind Builders

May 20, 1996

This letter introduces and supports my request for a Contract Zone within an IR1 Zone on Island Avenue on Cliff Island. I wish to rebuild my Barn which burned to the ground on November 27, 1995.

I founded my business, Finestkind Builders EPD Inc., on May 9, 1972 as a partnership. It was a part-time business primarily involved with excavation. In 1973 the State of Maine began implementing Federal regulations governing the removal of overboard discharge sewage pipes from the state's shorelines. We began to install conventional subsurface septic systems as well as DEP-licensed overboard discharge systems. We accomplished both the work and the licensing.

This work inevitably led to other residential construction business including foundations and plumbing and eventually to all the phases of residential building. In 1976 I bought out my partner and operated as a sole proprietorship until May of 1987, when we incorporated.

During the first ten years I operated with only a few employees and those mostly seasonal. The last fourteen years have seen my payroll run to as many as sixteen employees and close to \$200,000 per year.

At Finestkind we have emphasized hiring islanders as employees and/or hiring from off-island and encouraging them to live on Cliff Island. It has always been my goal to actively promote and maintain the year-round community on the Island. While homes were often available for under \$10,000 when I moved to Cliff in 1970, as the years passed and values rose by 1,000% to 2,000%, the new owners were unwilling to take on tenants in the winter and construction workers were unable to afford to buy these homes in competition with summer people seeking second homes. I was compelled to provide housing any way I could in order to secure the services of quality employees for year-round employment.

When during our annual evaluation process we discuss positive aspects of employment with Finestkind, I have repeatedly heard working within a few minutes of one's home cited as often as the variety of work opportunities presented each day.

We operated for many years out of my own cellar and back shed, which happen to be in a B-1 Zone, but we always longed for and planned on a barn which could house our equipment and supplies as well as provide quality work space. Having in 1978 bought 2.75 acres of land next to my family's cottage and having selectively cleared some of the growth on that parcel, I thought it would be a fine site for that barn. I came to City Hall and applied for a building permit. I was instructed to apply for an "accessory shed" even though it would measure 36' by 48' and stand 2 1/2 stories above street level.

Once permitted, we excavated the site and retained John Libby Barns to design and possibly erect the frame for the Barn. His estimate was far too high, so we set out to build it ourselves according to his basic framing plans. It would be gambrel style, to match the architecture of our cottage just down the hill. We poured over one hundred fifty yards of concrete and that was on top of solid ledge. The building was framed with 8" x 8" Douglas Fir and the main floor had joists and carrying timbers measuring up to 7" x 20." We used only top quality materials, including select white cedar shingles dipped in gray preservative, 30-year roof shingles, Velux roof windows, and Anderson Permashield casements.

Inside, our space went through several metamorphoses, but we ended up with a facility with a first class woodshop measuring 24' x 48', kitchen-quality cabinetry all around the perimeter, work tables and high quality table tools, and a dust removal system; a paint shop; a mechanical shop with a vehicle pit; storage room for all our private equipment; a two-floor apartment, one floor of which was 90% complete; a finished fitness room with aerobic and weight training equipment; and a large bay for temporary storage of large quantities of building materials, for winter building of large items such as floats and gangplanks, and for someday building boats. Within the building we stored over \$50,000 worth of building materials in clean, dry and orderly fashion. From time to time people from the island came to buy materials for do-it-yourself projects.

Outside the Barn, the acre or so of land we occupied also went through several metamorphoses. It started just as a construction site but within a year or so we began to accumulate a great deal of the trappings and "junk" of a typical general contractor. It soon became evident to us that we were not being good neighbors with that kind of mess, so from year two until the date of the fire we worked steadily to reduce and compact the storage of materials and equipment as well as to screen it. By the time of the fire we were about 90% through with organizing the mess and 50% complete in fencing and landscaping. The building itself was very attractive and the land from the street was as well. Much of the remaining landscaping and screening involved protecting the three nearest neighbors and the view from the water.

In the course of finishing the exterior of the Barn we built three modest gambrel additions. Toward the road was an 8' x 18' entrance; toward the water was an 8' x 24' extension; and toward the northeast was a 12' x 24' extension. Each of these additions added important interior space but they also dramatically improved the scale and design of the building. Unfortunately, we did not apply for permits for these three additions.

Since about 1983, or when Ben O'Reilly Jr. ceased to be the Public Works employee/supervisor on Cliff Island, we had been periodically approached about taking over the Public Works on a contract basis. We resisted for years because we were too busy with private work, we had no adequate facility at the time, and we did not wish to subject ourselves to the inevitable critical abuse which would come from within our own community. In April of 1991, however, we entered into an agreement to perform this work on a contracted basis and have been doing it ever since. In the course of this agreement we have stored some material and much City equipment on our site; it has been a difficult squeeze at best. For several summers around 1990 the City trash truck had been parked at various locations around the Island; every such site was soon rejected by the neighbors because of the visual spectre, the odor, or the animals attracted by the contents, particularly in the summer heat. We eventually agreed to keep the truck behind our building where it would be mostly hidden and relatively cool. This storage was not something I liked, but it worked. We received only \$100 per month for all this storage, congestion, and nuisance. In sum, the Public Works dovetailed neatly with our private work and we were able to keep on another full-time employee. The concept of performing this work only when it needed to be done and then by as many people as were needed worked well, and we are proud of the status of the public property on Cliff island resulting from our efforts. We have had a wonderful relationship with key City officials on Portland Street and in City Hall. Our facility was critical in keeping City equipment in operation without always having to send it up to the City or working on it out in the weather.

Among the future plans for the Barn was to have a manufacturing program so that we could level out the fluctuations in the service work on the Island and be able to offer increased employment in the winter when fishermen were not lobstering and when cottages were difficult to work on. We were experimenting with wholesale furniture manufacture as well as items such as one might find advertised in the holiday editions of Down East Magazine. The Barn could either be an assembly site or simply a gathering and distribution center for those doing their work at home prior to marketing it and shipping it off the Island.

The fire was caused by a short circuit in the main entrance panel, which was installed by a reputable, major electrical contractor. He also ran most of the circuits in the building. Ironically, we had just finished our first year of having fire extinguishers all through the Barn - as recommended, planned, and checked by a fire security company. We also had implemented an exemplary company safety program monitored by MEMIC. Our Workman's Comp insurance rating has just dropped below 1:00. Through such procedures and with such a facility as we just lost, Finestkind has

been able to provide fulfilling, high-quality, safe, well-paying, stable job opportunities to current and prospective Cliff Island residents. We have been in business for twenty-four years and wish to continue to do so.

This past winter, we were unable to offer three full-time work positions due to the loss of the Barn.

There is no appropriate location within a B-1 Zone available to Finestkind on Cliff Island. We have been at this site since 1988 and had come close to completing our facility inside and out. The concrete foundation still in place presents a footprint we would like to utilize for rebuilding a new facility. It would probably have a lower profile than the predecessor building but would have a similar design.

With my own family as neighbors, I am very concerned that Finestkind's Barn become and be a good neighbor itself. At times there will be construction noise and a congestion of vehicles; at times everyone will be out on job sites, particularly during the summer season. The seasonal residents of that section of Cliff Island tend to be at their cottages - during the work week - only during the period from Memorial Day to Labor Day. During the other nine months, cottage dwellers tend to be in residence mostly during weekends, when Finestkind will be relatively inactive. I wish to have as neat and quiet an operation as possible, with most of our trappings inside the building.

All three of the Barn's nearest neighbors, the only ones within sight or sound of the Barn, have availed themselves of our supply of hardware, electrical, plumbing, marine, and other building and repair supplies.

As of today, in May of 1996, about six months after the Fire, Finestkind is very much in full operation. We were based in a friend's garage for a while but had to leave there because that building is also not zoned for business. We have been working out of job sites and the experience has been arduous, following years of developing our fine facility.

We would very much like to rebuild the facility known now for eight years as the Finestkind Barn and request that a Contract Zone be established in order to allow us to do so.

Cliff Island

Cliff Island is the most remote neighborhood within the City of Portland.

It lies about six miles away from the Munjoy Hill peninsula. It measures about two miles long and is less than a mile at its widest point. It consists of about four hundred twenty-five acres, with about one hundred fifteen of those acres under some form of conservation management.

There are about one hundred thirty-two houses on the Island, forty year-round and the balance seasonal. The Public School is the focal point of this year-round island community, which is one of only fifteen still extant along the Maine Coast; there were once over three hundred. There are currently only seven pupils in the Cliff Island School, and it is the community's on-going concern that there be enough families of child-bearing-and-rearing age to maintain a viable year-round population. This past winter saw about sixty-eight full-time residents in the Island; many of these are elderly.

While there is a fine ferry service allowing employment on the mainland, employment on the island is of paramount importance, for then making a livelihood becomes integral with being a part of the community. The current list of occupations located on the Island includes teachers, storekeepers, Postal workers, artists, computer technologists, fishermen, and builders.

The inventory of island homes seems to require an endless amount of renovations and additions, and it is considered very important to have that work done by island residents in order that dollars earned remain as much as possible within the community.

Finestkind Builders has worked hard for almost a quarter century to ensure that such employment is available to current and prospective island residents.

Inspection Services
P. Samuel Hoffses
Chief



Planning and Urban Development
Joseph E. Gray Jr.
Director

CITY OF PORTLAND

February 27, 1996

Roger Berle
c/o Finestkind
6 Island Avenue
Cliff Island, ME 04109

RE: 109B-A-009 Island Ave., Cliff Island

Dear Mr. Berle,

This letter is in reference to your property at the above named location. Please note that you will need the proper permits to rebuild after fire. You will be subject to the requirements of the City's Zoning Ordinance, Building Codes, and Fire Codes. You may or may not be able to rebuild exactly what was there. This is because you did not follow the building plans and greatly exceeded the building area and increased the land use without approvals.

It will be necessary to notify this office as soon as you have definite plans and apply for a permit so that there is enough time for the proper reviews. A site plan review will probably be required.

It has also been brought to our attention that you may presently be running your business from the "workshop/storage" building of your neighbor who is in an IR-1 Zone. We have no permits on file allowing this use in that zone.

Please contact this office immediately in order to clarify these issues.

Sincerely,

Marge Schmuckal

Marge Schmuckal
Zoning Administrator

cc to: Joseph Gray Jr., Director of Planning and Urban Dev.
P. Samuel Hoffses, Chief of Inspection Services
Arthur Rowe, Code Enforcement Officer

*Joseph Bennet - Griff's Cove
Island Ave*

*3/20/96
Probably going to rebuild
same footprint
change up to
outside
George Flaherty
or municipal
use plan*

*doing all
work on job
site - 100%
storage*

information of floats

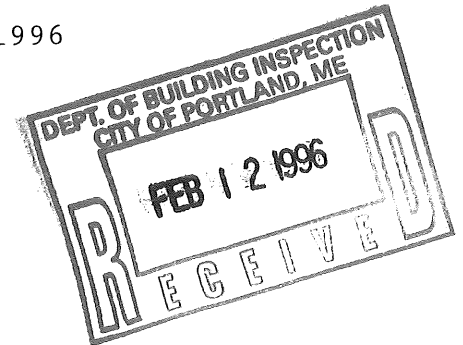
Anchorage Enterprises

Mansons
450 Granite Street
Yarmouth, ME
04096

February 9, 1996

Attn: Sam Hoffses
Building Inspector

Arthur Rowe
Code Enforcement Officer



Dear Sam and Arthur:

As we have already discussed, the building that recently burned on Cliff Island was built by Roger Berle with a permit that called for a "storage shed only (utility shed)", a 36' X 48' footprint, a building area of 1728SF, "no bathrooms", "an accessory building for storage only", with an estimated construction cost of \$30,000.

The actual building that evolved consisted of: 5,500SF, 5½ stories, a workshop with cabinets, "several apartments", a basement shop, and valued at approximately \$500,000. Berle, when bemoaning his insurance woes, explained that, "We kept improving and improving (the building)." Also, critical, of course, all this was done in an 1R-1 zone that, you explained, permits no outside storage.

As you know, all of this information has been printed in the Portland Press Herald (photostats inclosed). Since Berle has now publicly expressed his intention to rebuild "some sort of facility that may not be so big, but at least as nice", I was hoping that you would feel comfortable confronting Berle about his disregard for codes and permits and thereby prevent him from repeating any of this.

Furthermore, as was also reported in the paper, Berle is now conducting his business from the "workshop/storage" building of his abutting neighbor, Tom Wright, who is also in the 1R-1 zone. When we meet again, I shall share with you photographs of the now destroyed building with its associated exterior storage, i.e. loam, sand, gravel, lumber, moorings, septic tanks, trucks, backhoes, frontloaders, etc. When and if you visit his present operation, I am absolutely sure you will see the same illegal storage on his and/or Wright's 1R-1 property.

While my property is the one that was most affected by the construction of Berle's commercial monstrosity, there isn't a person on the island who hasn't wondered aloud about how he ever received permission to build it. The romantic notion that the building was a Mona Lisa that helped provide local jobs is certainly not the overriding majority opinion on the island. Certainly all of our immediate neighbors feel exactly the way I do.

2.

Finally, the articles I have enclosed document how vulnerable the structure in question made the island to fire. As you stated when we met, this is also an important concern to the city of Portland, and one that, perhaps, you may also choose to share with Mr. Berle.

In any case, I very much enjoyed talking with both of you and have been greatly encouraged by your responses. Needless to say, I shall be hoping you do not find my suggestions overly presumptuous, and I shall also be hoping we can meet at your early convenience. When that happens, I hope to learn what, if anything, you may be willing to do, so I can plan my next steps, should any be necessary.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'David W. Manson', written in dark ink.

David W. Manson

This ad, taken from the Seagull, Cliff Island's newsletter, provides some insight into the magnitude of Berle's 1R-1 commercial enterprise conducted from a "storage shed only".

Galvanized bolts, nuts, and washers
Hinges
Insulation
Joint compound
KRC-7 Water Treatment
Latex paint
Manure and mulch
Nails
Oak boards
Poplar and Pine Lumber
Quick-fit connectors
Receptacles and rebar
Sandpaper and sonotube
Tees (copper/steel/brass/PVC)
Underground wire
V-Belts for Engines
Water heater elements and washers
and X-Y-Z, which stands for the
kitchen sinks which we also carry!

The Question???

WHAT'S BEHIND THE BARN DOOR???

FINESTKIND

offers

Do-It-Yourself

or

FULL SERVICE

materials options...

...to say nothing of the people who are artists at working with all these items.

Give Us a Call

Or Come Explore Behind the Barn Door!

NOV. 28, 1995

'Terrifying' fire levels business on island

● Firefighters struggle to get water to the Finest Kind Builders facility as the blaze threatens to spread across Cliff Island.

By ALAN CLENDENNING
Staff Writer

A fire that raged for hours Monday on Cliff Island rattled residents' nerves and destroyed a building that housed a major island employer.

Firefighters were worried that they would be unable to control the blaze and that it might sweep through woods and destroy much of the tiny Casco Bay community.

"It was absolutely terrifying," said Cliff Island Fire Chief David Crowley.

Despite difficulty getting water to the scene, firefighters managed to prevent the fire at Finest Kind Builders from spreading. Authorities said no one was hurt.

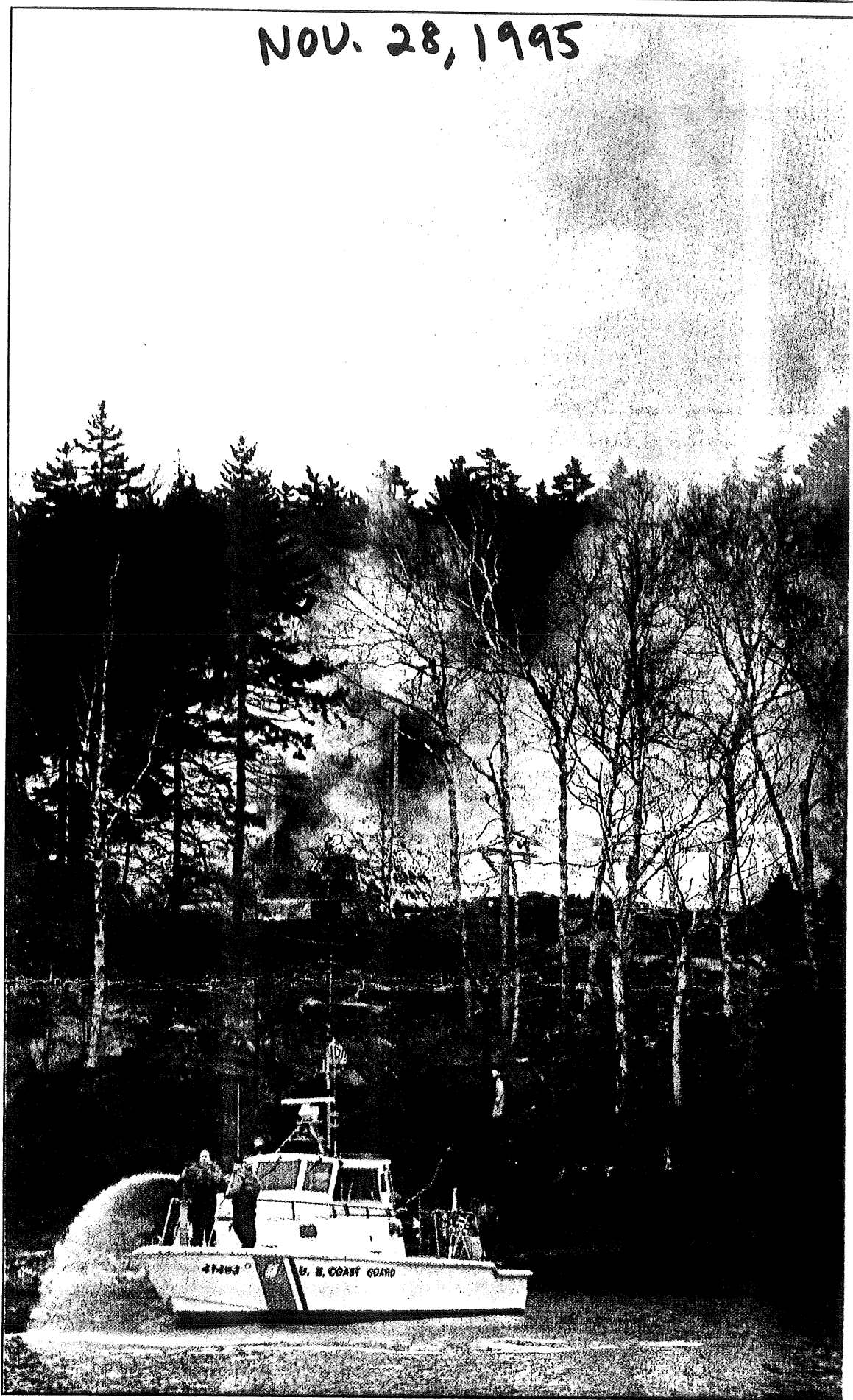
Officials are trying to determine how the fire started, said Portland Deputy Fire Chief Ronald Thompson. The fire erupted about 1 p.m. at the front of the building, which faces Casco Bay, he said.

For hours, flames burned the three-story post-and-beam building on Sunset Road, singed pine trees and leapt high into the air. Brush and grass near the water line burned. Firefighters were unable to save the building because they had neither enough water nor a powerful pump, authorities said.

Crowley said it was the worst fire in the 18 years that he has lived on the island. Islanders fear fires because the island has no hydrant system and because a severe forest fire could quickly go out of control.

"There's always the potential of the whole island going up with a bad fire," said Astrida Rideout, who lives about a mile from the fire site.

The building, owned by Roger Berle, housed the wood shop and other operations of Berle's construction company. Several apart-



A U.S. Coast Guard vessel stands by Monday near a fire on Cliff Island that destroyed a building housing a construction company. The fire chief called the blaze "absolutely terrifying." Another photo

Please see FIRE, Page 12A

Staff photo by John



Staff photo by John Ewing

Smoke and steam engulf Long Island firefighters Monday while they battle the blaze that destroyed Finest Kind Builders on Cliff Island. Firefighters had to shuttle ocean water to douse the fire.

FIRE

Continued from Page 1A

ments had been under construction on the third floor. Damage was estimated at \$500,000.

Islanders said about 10 of the island's 60 year-round residents work for Finest Kind Builders. The company's employee roster grows to about 20 during the summer, they said.

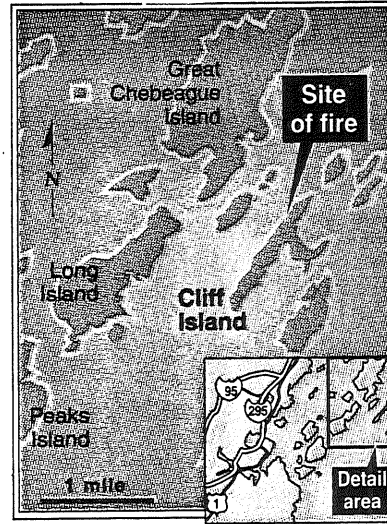
The firm plows and grades roads, constructs and remodels buildings and does plumbing and electrical work. Attempts to reach Berle failed Monday.

It took several hours for firefighters from Cliff Island, Long Island, Chebeague Island and Portland to bring the fire under control, said Thompson, the deputy fire chief.

Firefighters managed to get several vehicles away from the building on the northern end of the island, but a bucket loader was destroyed.

Cliff Island firefighters almost doused the fire much sooner, but their tanker ran out of water, Thompson and Crowley said.

A portable pump to bring water from Casco Bay wasn't powerful



Staff art

enough to send water up a steep incline to the building. Firefighters set up a shuttle system to transport ocean water by fire trucks from the ferry landing, about a mile from the fire scene.

The precious time that effort took "was all that fire needed" to turn into an inferno, Thompson said. Crowley said he will try to get a more powerful portable water pump for the island.

Portland's fireboat wasn't available to help fight the fire because it

“There’s always the potential of the whole island going up with a bad fire.”

Astrida Rideout, resident

is in Boothbay Harbor being repaired or refitted. But Crowley said he didn't think that boat would have made much difference, because it takes the boat 75 minutes to reach Cliff Island, which is part of Portland.

Island firefighters and local fishermen helped douse areas around the fire scene, helping to prevent its spread, Thompson said.

Shawn O'Reilly, a native Cliff Islander, said the potential economic impact of the firm's loss hadn't sunk in yet for most islanders.

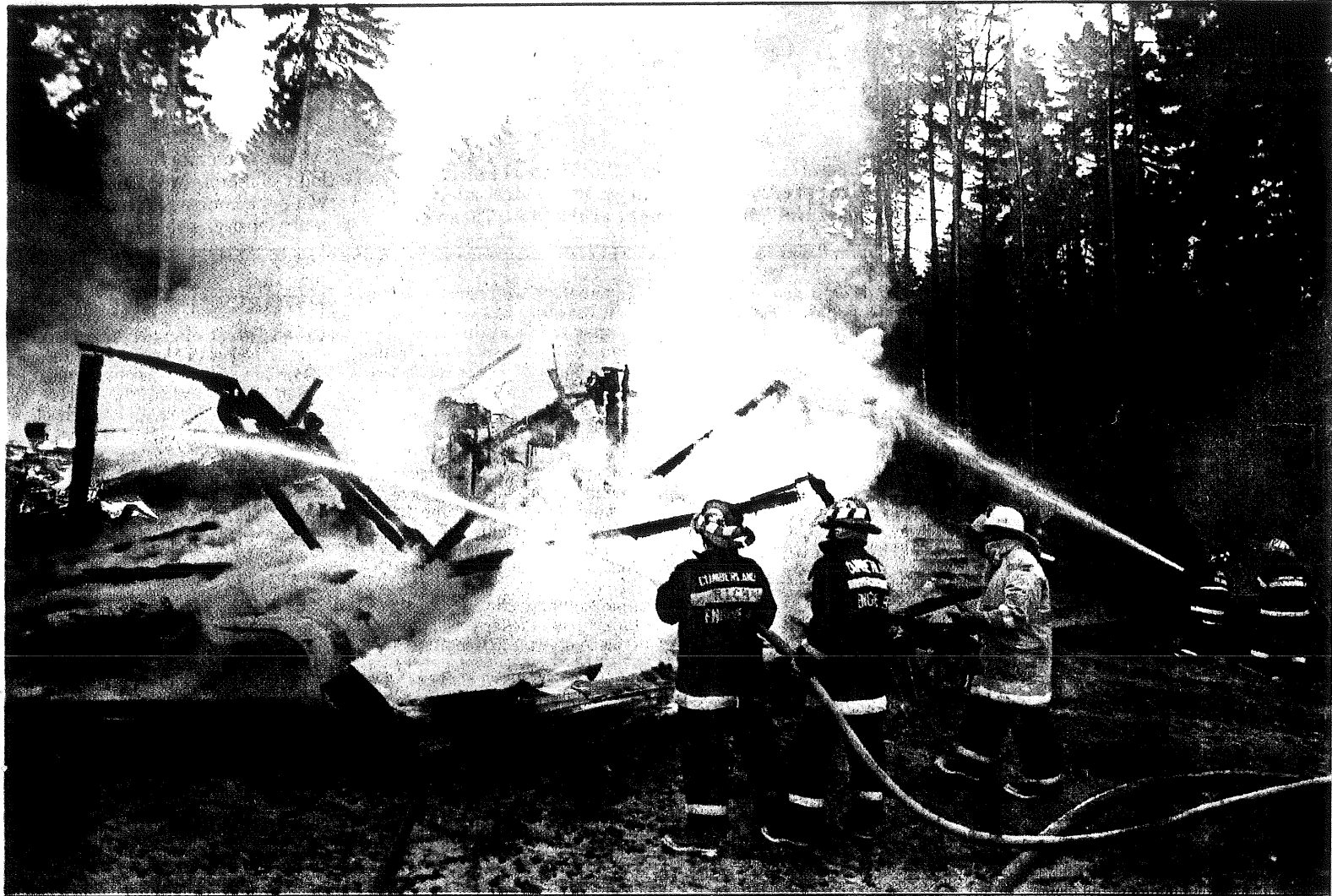
“I'm just definitely thankful that it wasn't worse than it was and that no one got hurt,” O'Reilly said.

FOR A LINK to the Cliff Island home page on the Internet, see the Press Herald's World Wide Web site:

www.portland.net/ph

Island fire

NOV. 28, 1995



Staff photos by John Ev

Firefighters hose down the remains of a building that burned on Cliff Island Monday. The fire destroyed Finest Kind Builders, the island's largest employer. For hours, flames burned the three-story structure, singed trees and threatened to spread. Story, 1A



John Rich, a Cumberland volunteer firefighter, pours water onto a burning building Monday on Cliff Island. Firefighters feared they wouldn't be able to control the fire and it would sweep the island.

Workers at burned-out building mourn the loss of 'work of art'

● The Cliff Island building destroyed by fire was so much more than an office to Finest Kind workers. **Nov. 29, 1995**

By EDIE LAU
Staff Writer

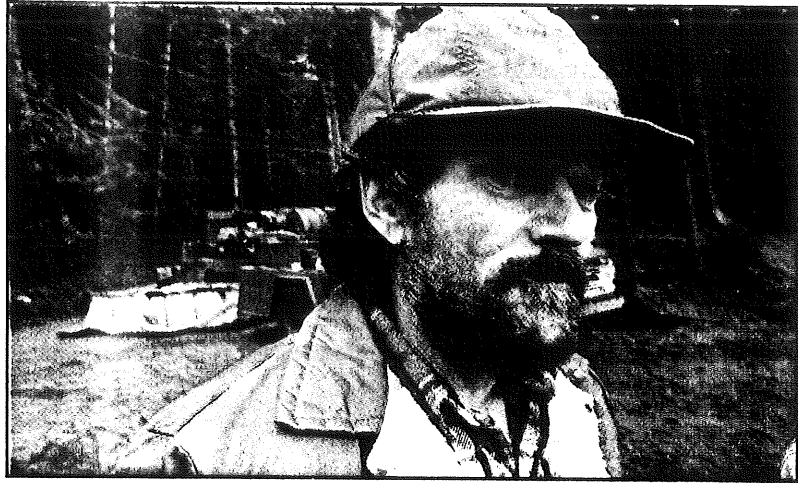
Ben O'Reilly Sr. lives on a cove away from the buildings that loop around Cliff Island. His windows are closed against the coming winter. But when a huge fire broke out a mile away, the odor came in.

"My house, I could smell the smoke in it all the way over there," O'Reilly said.

The invasive smell was a tangible sign that when something is lost on a small island community - winter population about 65 - nearly everyone feels it.

That was especially true of the effects of Monday's fire, which leveled the island's tallest building, housing its single biggest employer.

Nobody was hurt in the fire, which broke out during the lunch hour when workers at Finest Kind Builders had gone home to eat. But



Staff photo by Doug Jones

Gary MacVane, a Finest Kind employee and volunteer firefighter, was one of two men on the scene first. "The third time she lit up," MacVane said, "I didn't have any more water."

to hear employees speak of it Tuesday, the building they lost had almost a living presence.

They described their 5½-story workshop as a thing of beauty, its outside shingled in cedar, its inside filled with fine cabinetry under exposed-beam ceilings. They affectionately called it The Barn because of the gambrel roof.

"What disturbs me the most

about it is not whether my job's at stake, or the material loss. Everything's replaceable," Dale Dyer, one of 12 employees, said Tuesday. "But it's like burning the Mona Lisa. It was a work of art."

The "work of art" is a pile of blackened debris on mud now. The forested lot where it stood was the

Please see FIRE, Page 10A

FIRE

Continued from Page 1A

focus of attention Tuesday, drawing investigators from the Portland police and fire departments searching for a cause.

Though they reached no conclusions, investigators narrowed their search to the vicinity of an electrical panel in a basement maintenance shop.

"There's not much left of it," said police Detective Daniel Young, a fire investigator. "We're digging out whatever components we can find. We haven't found anything unusual."

Islanders said that a fisherman from neighboring Long Island reported the fire about 1 p.m. Gary MacVane, an employee and volunteer firefighter, was one of two men on the scene first.

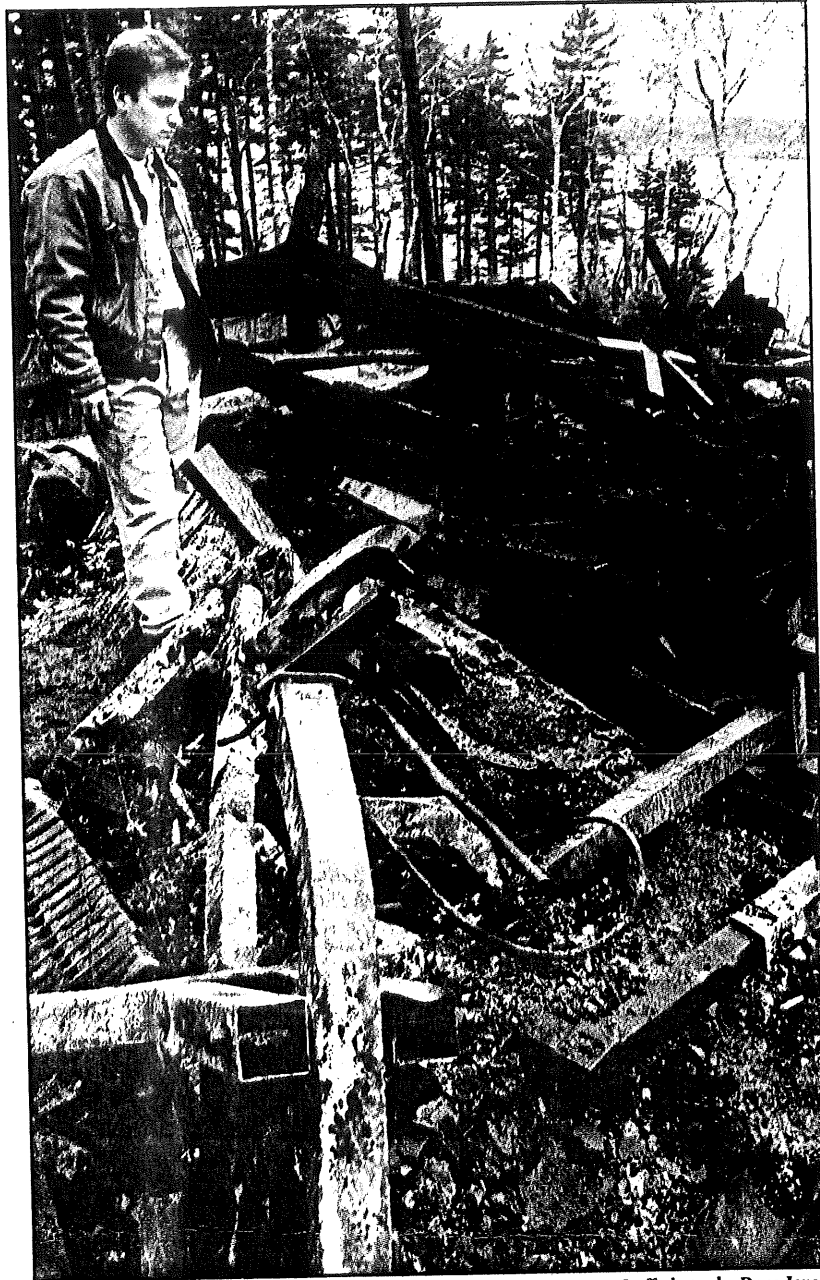
The men brought two firetrucks that together carried 1,250 gallons of water. The fire was within the basement shop when they arrived, and they doused the flames so well that even the smoke cleared.

MacVane began tearing down damaged insulation, then saw the electrical panel glow. He hosed more water on it, and the glow died. Then it flared again.

"The third time she lit up," MacVane said ruefully, "I didn't have any more water."

Cliff Island Fire Chief David Crowley, also an employee at Finest Kind, arrived shortly after MacVane to see the fire virtually out. He opened a pair of doors to air out the building.

When the water ran out and the flames sprung anew, the fire shot out the doorway and curled over the building. After that, firefighters from Cliff, Long and Chebeague islands and Portland's mainland could do nothing to save The Barn.



Staff photos by Doug Jones

Dale Dyer, one of 12 employees, looks at the remnants of the company's weight-training room. "It's like burning the Mona Lisa. It was a work of art," he said of the building.

Inadequate insurance

It was heartbreaking, too. Crowley helped design and build The Barn in 1988. He was the first employee of Finest Kind Builders, hired some 18 years ago by the owner, Roger Berle. Back then, the two men "did little stuff," Crowley said: "Digging holes, burying septic tanks."

The business operated first out of the cellar of Berle's house near the ferry landing, then in an outbuilding with a modest 160 square feet.

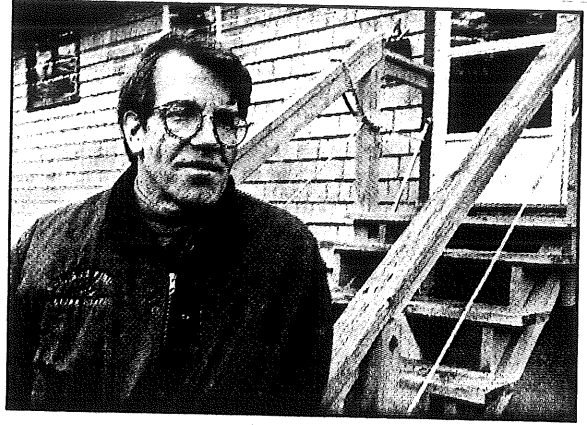
The business expanded, with more jobs — from road maintenance to cabinet building — and more employees. Last year, Finest Kind's payroll totaled \$200,000 by Berle's account, money that he said went strictly to islanders.

The 5,500-square-foot workshop on a waterfront lot gave the business deluxe quarters with a homey touch.

Last year, some employees built a workout room, equipped with free weights and a weight machine. The fire melted the machine into a tangle of metal, a stack of weights collapsed lengthwise like the keys of a xylophone.

Crowley estimated the value of the building and its contents at \$500,000. Berle met with an in-

Roger Berle, the building owner, met with an insurance adjuster and found out he's probably \$200,000 short. "I didn't keep up. We kept improving and improving (the building)."



surance adjuster Tuesday, and found to his chagrin that his coverage probably wasn't enough.

"I'm finding out that I'm probably a couple hundred thousand short," Berle said. "I didn't keep up. We kept improving and improving (the building)."

Visibly disheartened, Berle is not even sure he will rebuild — though he knows that his employees have faith that he will.

"I don't want to say anything that will lead them on falsely, or discourage them," Berle said. "It's too early to tell. I'm just trying to sort out the damage and cost."

Island residents, for their part,

are thankful the inferno didn't swallow more than one building. Gathered in the post office at noon Tuesday waiting for their mail, folks commented that they were lucky the island isn't as dry as it was this summer.

The steam that rose off pieces of still-warm metal Tuesday testified to the fire's ferocity. Dyer had trouble believing the destruction.

"You know how you lose a body part, and you still feel it?" he said. "I go home, and to me (the building is) not really gone. It's still there. Then I come here and have to deal with reality."

Cliff Island builder developing plans to rebuild The Barn

The Barn may be gone, but its lot will not stand empty for long.

Roger Berle, owner of the beloved Cliff Island building that was destroyed by fire in November, said he will rebuild.

Not a replica of The Barn, Berle said, but "some sort of facility that may not be quite so big, but at least as nice." He hopes to begin construction in summer.

The Barn housed Finest Kind Builders, Cliff Island's single-biggest employer. The 7-year-old workshop, which featured a gambrel roof, exposed-beam ceilings and fine cabinetry, was described by employees as a work of art.

Berle said the building was underinsured by \$250,000. He declined to say what the total loss was.

For now, Finest Kind is working out of a neighboring building loaned by Tom Wright, a fellow construction-businessman. Because some of what Finest Kind does is outdoors — road maintenance and snow-clearing, for example — the fire didn't stop its activity.

But it's decidedly shrunken. Berle said he'd normally have a work force of nine or 10 people now, but instead has six employees. Among the casualties are two island lobstermen to whom he could not offer



**Edie
Lau**