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Student hurt in blaze

Gramercy Park inferno NYU's latest tragedy

By JONATHAN LEMIRE
and TOM RAFTERY
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITERS

A 21st birthday party ended in horror yesterday when flames swept through a Gramercy Park apartment, injuring eight current and former NYU students, fire officials said.

One young woman staggered into the street with burns over 50% of her body, authorities said.

The electrical blaze erupted in a third-floor unit on E. 18th St. between First and Second Aves. at 5:30 a.m.

"I got outside, and some people went back in to look for others," said Ryan McCaffrey, 25, a guest at the party for Brian Mahanna, one of the apartment's three tenants. "There was so much smoke and flame."

'Radiant heat'

Firefighters found the badly burned woman, 21-year-old Isabelle Heina, on the sidewalk and rushed her to the burn unit at New York Weill Cornell Medical Center, where she was in critical condition yesterday, officials said.

Another victim, Melissa Blach, 22, of Philadelphia, was discovered unconscious in the apartment's living room and hospitalized in serious condition at the burn unit.

"We could feel the radiant heat coming off the apartment door," said Lt. John Mahoney of Ladder Co. 3, whose team rescued Blach. "We pushed in, hands and knees. You couldn't see your hand in front of your face. I felt the couch. She was right there."

Mahanna, one of his roommates, 22-year-old Micah Lasher, and 23-year-old Michelle



JOHN FISCHETTI

SAFE Residents of Gramercy Park apartment building on 18th St. huddle outside yesterday after a fire swept through a third floor flat. Several tenants were hurt in the blaze.

Cruz were taken to Weill Cornell in stable condition. McCaffrey and the third occupant of the flat, 23-year-old Jeffrey Edmondson, Heina's boyfriend, were taken to Bellevue Hospital in stable condition, the FDNY said.

A party guest whose name was not released was treated at the scene, Fire Department spokesman Sean Johnson said.

Investigators blamed the fire on an overloaded or defective power strip in the apartment's rear bedroom.

The blaze was the latest setback for the school, which has seen three apparent student suicides since Sept. 12.

Could have been worse

But warnings from several smoke alarms prevented the blaze from being much worse, fire officials said. The blaze was brought under control in 40 minutes by more than 100 responding firefighters.

Maria Winfield, 25, who lives

on the fourth floor of the six-story building, said she was awakened by firefighters breaking the windows of the burning unit below. Winfield and her partner, TV news reporter Mark Joyella, 37, gathered their dogs and started down the fire escape.

"Everybody was great, everybody was looking out for everybody else, making sure everybody was getting out," Joyella said.

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