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Saukville man shot himself after starting fire Sunday in Moose Lodge apartment

Saukville firefighters started the day with heavy hearts Sunday, attending memorial services for a former assistant fire chief who had died last week at the age of 88.

Hours after the visitation for Orville Biever, the department was called to a fire scene only to discover the body of Timothy Karrels, 36, a current member of the Saukville Fire Department.

Karrels had been with the department for 13 years, starting as an emergency medical technician. He was on sick leave as a firefighter after suffering a traumatic brain injury suffered in a fall in 2010.

Saukville police have ruled that the Sunday night fire at the Moose Lodge, 195 E. Green Bay Ave., was intentionally set by Karrels, who then committed suicide.

Police received a 911 call from a witness reporting the smell of smoke coming from the lodge at 9:45 p.m. The witness also said he saw smoke coming from an upper-story vent.

An officer responding to the call knew there were apartments on the second floor of the building and went upstairs to see if anyone was home.

The officer reported smoke coming from one of the apartment units. When he forced open the door to the rear apartment where Karrels lived, he encountered heavy smoke and had to retreat to the building's lower level.

Firefighters arrived at the scene a little while later and found Karrels' body in the apartment. He was pronounced dead at the scene at 10:31 p.m.

An autopsy was conducted Monday by the Milwaukee Medical Examiner's Office, which ruled Karrels had set his apartment on fire and then shot himself. His cause of death was listed as a self-inflicted gunshot wound.

The State Fire Marshal's office was also called to investigate the fire.

No firefighters were injured fighting the fire, which was limited to the upstairs.

Karrels opened Doc's Dart & Pool Gaming Supplies on Grand Avenue in Port Washington last year and frequently worked as a disc jockey with a company he started at the age of 18.

Saukville Fire Chief Gilly Schultz said dealing with the death has been difficult for his members, especially because Karrels was so devoted to the department.

"He started as an EMT and did a great job. Tim later became a firefighter. After his injury he lost

his driver's license but he would ride around on his bike, and often would get to the fire station when a fire call came in before the guys who were driving," Schultz said.

Karrels' mother Barbara said her son and entire family took pride in being part of the Saukville Fire Department community.

"To his nieces and nephews, Uncle Timmy was a hero. They loved visiting the fire station during open houses, trying on the firefighting gear and manning the fire hoses with Tim," his mother said.

A complete obituary appears in today's Ozaukee Press.