

Explosion wreaks havoc in Markham



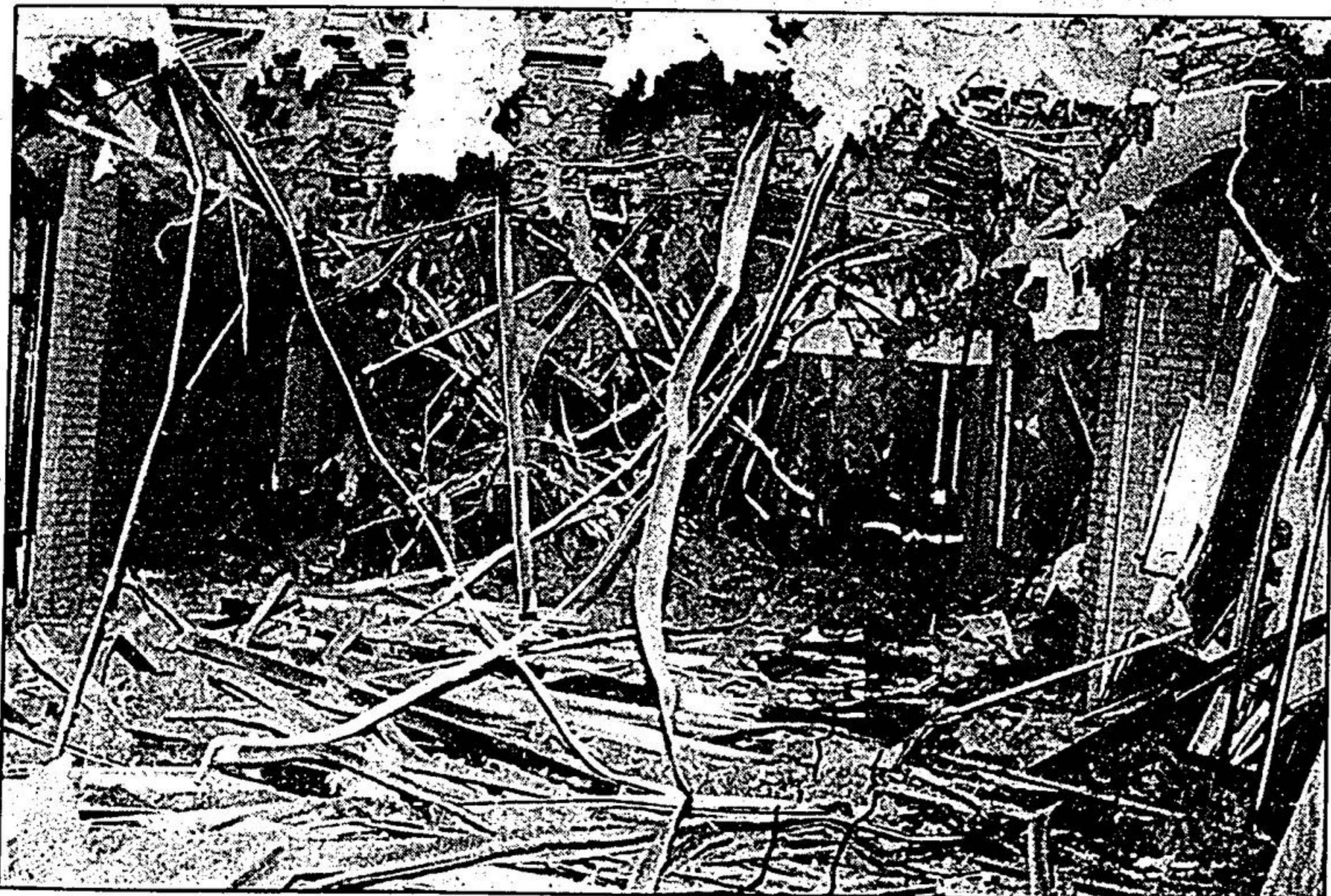
A Markham firefighter looks through the rubble in Markham Village Grocers following Thursday's early-morning explosion at Markham Village

Lanes on Main St. Forensic experts are continuing their investigation to determine the cause of the blast. No one was injured.



Manny Elkind (right), owner of Markham Village Lanes, speaks with a police detective shortly after

Thursday's explosion at the Main St. plaza. Damage is estimated to be as high as \$5 million.



Markham firefighters survey the twisted wreckage caused by an explosion at Markham Village Lanes

on Thursday. The blast, which could be heard and felt up to a 1/2-mile away, occurred about 1:15 a.m.

— Photos by Bill Lanning

By PAULA CROWELL
Staff Reporter

An explosion Thursday morning at a Markham shopping centre affected many people in a variety of ways.

The blast, which took place at 1:16 a.m. at Markham Village Lanes, could be heard by residents as much as 1/2-mile away from the scene on Main St. north of Hwy 7.

Roy Whiston, co-owner and bar manager of Lindner's Restaurant was the only person at the mall when the explosion took place. He had just locked up the lower level banquet facilities and had climbed the stairs when he felt the blast. It knocked him to his knees.

"If I had been 23 seconds later, I would have been blown away," he said in an interview yesterday.

Under normal circumstances, Mr. Whiston, 50, would have been working later. However, Wednesday night wasn't too busy and most of the staff was sent home by midnight.

"I just thank God. I could have been waving down from Heaven today," he said.

Margaret McKavanagh of Wooten Way north said she and her husband were awakened by what sounded like someone slamming their garage door. Her home is almost one mile away from the shopping centre.

"Half of the house shook, we could feel the vibrations," she said. "No one was on the street outside so we thought for sure it was something in the house."

Ann Middlebrook of Windridge

Dr. also heard the blast.

"It scared the daylights out of us. We just had gas put in and we thought it was the gas exploding. It seemed like everything in the house compressed for a few seconds," she said.

Many of the merchants haven't yet been allowed in their stores to survey the damage. While some of it is cosmetic — broken glass and broken doors — there is concern that the building suffered structural damage.

Bruce Hill of Hillebrand Wines said only one bottle of wine was broken in his store.

"Well, this is one way to attract people to the plaza," he joked.

Valerie Baxter of Remax Realty Ltd. said of the newly-opened office, "Good thing we got our grand opening over with," but added, "Guess we're moving again."

Merchants weren't the only people affected by the explosion.

Steve Lennox and his fiancée Catherine Veres planned to have their wedding reception on Saturday, Aug. 23 at banquet facilities in the Village Lanes.

They booked the hall in January and Mr. Lennox said everything was going smoothly until the explosion.

"This is just unbelievable," he said.

Despite the calamity, Mr. Lennox joked that his future father-in-law planned it to prevent the wedding from taking place.

The chances of finding an alternate location for the reception in a week are slim, he admitted.

The help-line connection

Here's help if your business dealings with merchants in the Markham Village Lanes have been interrupted by the bomb blast.

INTRA Village Lanes Travel: Anyone holding a file, especially those travelling within the next two weeks, are urged to get in touch as soon as possible. The agency has temporarily relocated to Custom Interiors at 131 Main St. N. in the Tremont Hotel. Phones will be installed Monday with the old phone number, 471-1424.

Susan Bates, co-owner says computer records and files are buried under rubble and tickets will have to be re-issued, which takes time.

ReMax Real Estate: Best advice for clients is to contact their agent at home. Or, call the ReMax number to reach

their temporary office at Guardian Real Estate (four desks, 30 agents). Charles DeBourbon of ReMax said the company is jumping to find a new location and asks that clients be extra patient during the transition.

LA Hair Design: Clients are asked to call Svengali at 471-6662 to reach operators such as Venet Classique from LA or owner, Angelo Nicastro.

Canada Employment Centre: Contact the Scarborough office at 200 Town Centre Court (McCowan and Hwy 401) or phone 973-4400 for employment or 973-4425 for unemployment insurance.

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