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MADISON TODAY

Madison Woman Dies in Road Crash

... Vaughn, 21, of Schoonheim-
neida, died Saturday when she
l of her car on a curve on
l Saturday morning in Oneida,
rts said.
lid on the unplowed road and
d before a Frehofer's delivery
police said.

STORY, PAGE B-1

federal officials return to the
ek to talk about the Oneida
at application, but some wonder
ormation session didn't happen

OKK: Oneida High School teach-
ir students by forming a rock

ES: The Cazenovia girls volley-
on the Class B regional title Sat-
ison County high school sports

Would volunteers be enough for a big fire at Turning Stone? Experts: High-Rise Fires Need Massive, Immediate Response

By Aaron Gifford
Staff writer

The Turning Stone Casino and Resort in Verona is one of Central New York's top visitor attractions. Its 20-story hotel is the tallest building between Syracuse and Albany.

Yet none of the firefighters who would be first responders to an emergency there has been trained to battle fires in large buildings or high-rises. And the department that would respond first has not

brought the minimum number of firefighters required in five of the six emergencies at the resort since 2000.

Those are some of the ways in which the training and the manpower intended to deal with an emergency at Turning Stone fall short, according to a Post-Standard review of fire safety records and plans for a fire at the resort.

Turning Stone employs more than 4,500 people and attracts 12,000 to 15,000 patrons each day, making it host to some of

the largest gatherings in Central New York, outside of a big game at the Carrier Dome or a busy day at Carousel Center mall.

The dome and the mall are protected by full-time professional firefighters. So are other Indian-run casino/hotel complexes in the Northeast.

In case of a fire at Turning Stone, emergency dispatchers would alert the Verona

INSIDE

- What Turning Stone does to keep itself safe
- The response to six fires
- Which fire departments would be called

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■ Turning Stone hotel vs. The Marx
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FIRE, PAGE A-14

TURNING STONE CASINO

Fire official: Plan calls for aid from eight departments

FRM FROM PAGE A-1

Fire Department by sounding a siren at the station and paying its 44 members. Available Verona volunteers — and no one is sure how many that would be — would be the first sent.

If the fire was serious, Verona's commander would have to decide whether to call backup, almost all of whom would also be volunteers.

"It's a gigantic life-safety issue that presents a significant hazard," said Glenn Corbett, fire science professor at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York City. "This is something that may only happen once in a lifetime or once in a couple of lifetimes. But if it happens, you've got to be ready."

Volunteers, he said, "shouldn't be responsible for this."

Turning Stone's emergency response plan was drawn up early in 2004 by Verona Fire Commissioner Phil DuChene, with help from Oneida nation Public Safety Commissioner Art Pierce and Mark Schroeder, a lieutenant with the Syracuse Fire Department.

"The Verona Fire Department recognizes there are times when we will be short-handed," DuChene said. But, he said, that's the reason the Verona plan calls for mutual aid from eight surrounding departments. Two are professional agencies — Rome and Oneida — though they would supply fewer than 20 of the expected additional 80 firefighters.

The Oneidas also endorse the emergency plan.

"The nation is satisfied with the mutual response plan and is satisfied with the nation's training program," said nation spokesman Mark Emery. "However, these approaches are always under review."

There has never been a fire at Turning Stone that set the backup plan into motion.

No full-time department

The Oneida Indian Nation pays the Verona Fire Department \$100,000 a year to protect Turning Stone Casino, the hotel and other buildings at the Oneida County resort, DuChene said.

Long before there was a resort, however, the Oneidas opened a bingo hall in an effort to raise enough money to help protect their lands and people from fire. In 2001, they went so far as to charge a 5 percent "sales tax" on goods sold at their SavOn convenience stores to fund the fire fund. Some of that money goes "indirectly" for fire protection, according to Emery.

Yet after so much growth, nation leaders have no plans for a tribal fire department.

"It's always been discussed," said Oneida Men's Council member Brian Patterson. "But with us, it's something that works better with mutual aid and partnerships with the community."

It's different at comparable Indian-run resorts.

The Seneca Niagara Casino and Hotel in Niagara Falls is covered by a full-time city department, as is the Senecas' smaller casino/hotel complex in Salamanca. Among other major Indian-run casinos in the Northeast, the Mohicans, owners of Mohagan Sun, and the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation, owners of Foxwoods, run their own paid, full-time departments less than a mile from their casinos and high-rise hotels in Connecticut.

The Pequots spend about \$1.5 million annually on public safety, the bulk of which funds the 31-member fire department, said tribal spokesman Bruce MacDonald.

DuChene, of the Verona fire department, says his department could change to include some professionals, but only if expan-

sion in the area creates financial sources that could pay for it.

"As we move into the future, we have plans to initiate a combined fire department structure in Verona (with both volunteer and paid staff) similar to departments in the Syracuse suburbs (Trayetteville, Manlius)," he said.

As a sovereign Indian nation, meanwhile, the Oneidas also argue that nation property is beyond the reach of state and local laws, including inspections of sprinkler systems, smoke alarms and fire escapes.

Emery said all inspections are conducted by the nation itself, not by municipal inspectors.

That situation could change. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled last year that the nation could not reclaim control over land out of its possession for 200 years.

Since then, the nation has allowed Oneida County officials to tour the resort as they prepare to start enforcing health laws there, including the statewide smoking ban.

Town officials have not said whether they'll send fire marshals to conduct safety checks at the resort. Emery said there are no current plans to bring them in.

Smoking, meanwhile, is allowed in 17 percent of the resort's buildings, according to the nation.

Training issues

Eight area fire departments have signed onto the fire response plan drawn up by the Verona Fire Department early in 2004.

Since then, there has been one training drill, on Oct. 29.

Emery, the Oneida spokesman, said 81 firefighters practiced maneuvering hoses through halls and stairwells, putting water on a mock multiroom fire and rescuing a 200-pound dummy. Two departments didn't participate.

The vast majority of firefight-

"The Verona Fire Department recognizes there are times when we will be short-handed."

— Phil DuChene, Verona fire commissioner

ers in the departments have never responded to a real emergency there.

Volunteer firefighters who are accustomed to house and barn fires should train monthly to prepare for potential mass-casualty incidents at Turning Stone, said Corbett, the fire science professor at John Jay College.

Even though his department was unable to make the Oct. 29 drill, and has never trained there, Rome Fire Chief Roger Sabia agreed regular hands-on drills at the complex are vital.

"It lets us know what's there and where there are hazards, the roadways to get there," Sabia said. "It's very, very important."

Volunteer firefighters in New York state are not required to meet individual state training mandates, but department chiefs often encourage their members to meet the state's basic recommended training.

There are more than 225 volunteers who could be called to a major fire at Turning Stone. Four of them have taken what is currently recognized as the state's most basic level of training, according to Department of State records.

That basic training, called Firefighter I, mainly covers house fires, the most serious incidents rural volunteers are expected to see. In the class, they learn how to ventilate the structure, rescue victims and extinguish the blaze from the outside.



John Berry / Staff photo
PERSONNEL WITH the Verona Fire Department take part in a training exercise at the Turning Stone Casino and Resort in Verona this past October. From left are Kevin Oatman, David Kennett

But a hotel fire is different, experts say, especially if the responders are unfamiliar with the scene.

When firefighters attack a fire in a large building, they crawl deep inside the corridors feeling around for victims, windows, doors and other possible ventilation points or exits. Even blinded by toxic smoke or darkness, a well-trained firefighter can maintain confidence in his ability, at snack and team members, firefighters and instructors said.

Corbett said the volunteers who protect Turning Stone should also complete Firefighter II, a course that focuses on large gathering places or tall buildings.

The paid Rome and Oneida firefighters have completed professional-level training at a state fire academy, which exceeds Firefighter I and II. But firefighters from those departments would represent fewer than 20 of those responding to a major fire at Turning Stone.

"The training for interior fire fighting is paramount," said Doug Whitacker, fire protection coordinator of Onondaga Community College's fire protection technology program. "If a firefighter gets hurt and he hasn't had adequate training, the fire department administration is going to hang."

Manpower issues

It's virtually impossible to predict how many and how quickly volunteers from any of the fire departments would respond to a fire at Turning Stone because many work 20 or 30 miles away, near Utica and Syracuse.

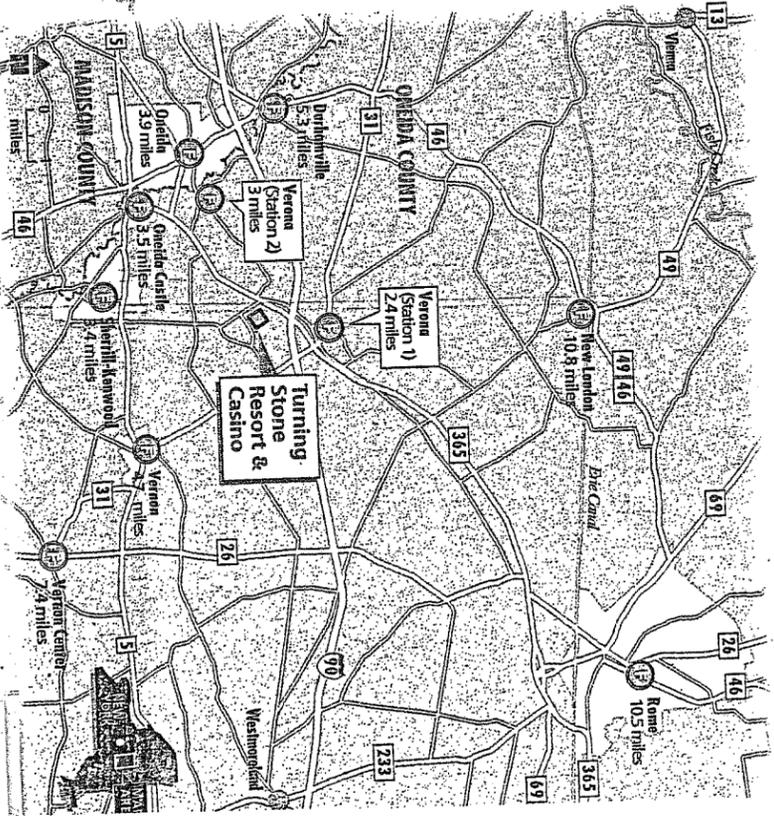
But this much is a matter of record: In the six fires at the resort since 2000, Verona firefighters failed five times to bring in the minimum manpower recommended by the National Fire Protection Association, reports filed with the state Department of State revealed.

The only serious fire occurred March 10, 2004, when the tower and other expansions to Turning Stone were being built. A construction vehicle was reported ablaze at 9:23 a.m. in the unfinished Event Center, completed Event Center. According to the Oneida County 911 center, it took a dozen Verona firefighters 14 minutes to get there.

Under 2004 national standards set by the NFPA for volunteer departments, the response time and turnout were unacceptable. The NFPA calls for at least 15 people at the fire within nine minutes in any emergency where 1,000 people occupy one square mile.

In its emergency response plan, the Verona fire department expects at least 80 firefighters from the eight other participating departments to arrive at Turning Stone within 20 minutes. Former Oneida Fire Chief

DEWITT, PAGE A-15



KEY
Fire station
Distance from Turning Stone

Answering the call
In case of a fire or other emergency at Turning Stone, the first call goes to the Verona Fire Department. When necessary, other area departments are called to assist.

Department	Active members	Equipment/manpower	Response time
Verona	44	Most members work locally; the current chief is available for all daytime calls. Equipment/manpower expected: 25-40 members, five engines for pumping water, a tanker truck, a salvage vehicle and Oneida County's air van for refilling air bottles	15 minutes
Oneida Castle	26	About half work in the Utica or Syracuse area, mainly day shifts	10-15 firefighters, one engine and one rescue truck
Sherill-Kenwood	47	Most work during the day	10-15 firefighters, one engine, one rescue truck; a new 100-foot ladder truck arrived this month
Vermon	25	More than half	10-15 firefighters, one engine and one rescue truck
Durhamville	25	5-10 are available for daytime calls	Equipment/manpower expected: 10-15 firefighters, one engine and one rescue truck
Oneida	24	Professional members: 24 Equipment/manpower expected: 100-foot ladder truck and four firefighters	10-15 firefighters, one engine and one rescue truck
Vermon Center	30	Most are employed within a short drive of the station and work days	Equipment/manpower expected: 10-15 firefighters, one engine and one rescue truck
Rome	86	Professional members: 86 Equipment/manpower expected: 100-foot ladder truck and 5-10 firefighters	10-15 firefighters, one engine and one rescue truck

The Post-Standard

Falling to meet the mark

National Fire Protection Association standards say at least 15 firefighters should arrive within nine minutes of any call to a place where 1,000 people occupy one square mile. Volunteers from the Verona Fire Department fell short on all but one fire at Turning Stone in the past four years.

DATE (TIME OF REPORT)	TYPE	RESPONSE PERSONNEL (15 REQUIRED)	RESPONSE TIME (9 MINUTES MAXIMUM)
March 10, 2004 (9:23 a.m.)	Vehicle fire	12 firefighters	14 minutes
Oct. 13, 2002 (4:15 p.m.)	Car fire	7 firefighters	7 minutes
Nov. 11, 2002 (5:56 p.m.)	Car fire	16 firefighters	7 minutes
Jan. 11, 2000 (12:24 a.m.)	Trash fire (outdoors)	14 firefighters	10 minutes
Jan. 18, 2000 (2:11 a.m.)	Trash fire (outdoors)	14 firefighters	11 minutes
April 19, 2000 (1:41 p.m.)	Car fire	7 firefighters	7 minutes

Source: New York State Office of Fire Prevention and Control

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Fire protections built into the Turning Stone Resort and Casino

If a fire does occur inside a hotel room or an indoor attraction at Turning Stone Resort and Casino, protectors are in place to contain the blaze and alert patrons and employees.

There are several fire walls throughout the gaming floor and the narrow corridors that connect the casino, restaurants, Event Center, Showroom and hotels on the ground floor. These steel, flame-resistant barriers would help keep fire, smoke and heat from spreading to other parts of the resort.

A security command center uses a global positioning system to locate trouble spots. The location is pinpointed on a computer screen in the resort's security command center.

Emergency lights direct people to the fire exits, and electrical generators are on standby if utilities shut down during an emergency. Facility engineers are at the resort during the day and some are on call overnight.

Duct detectors automatically stop the flow of oxygen to a hot spot. There also are special heat sensors in the kitchen and maintenance rooms and carbon monoxide detectors throughout the buildings.

Layers of steel and other non-combustible materials separate each room, making it difficult for fire to spread quickly. In accordance with the Building Officials and Code Administrators International Standards, the state bases its codes on BOCA standards.

Security guards have been trained to use fire extinguishers in some instances and evacuate people from the buildings.

Turning Stone employees regularly practice fire drills. The evacuation plans are in place and regularly reviewed by the nation's fire provider.

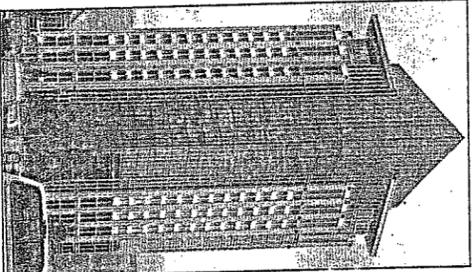
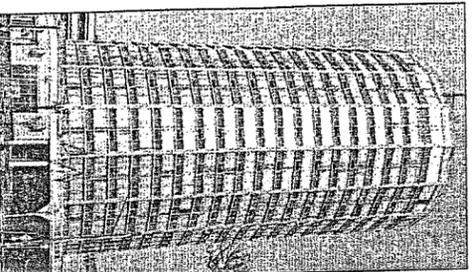
There are water hydrants around the perimeter of the resort. Those devices and the sprinkler systems are tested often.

Hotel rooms are equipped with at least one fire extinguisher and one smoke detector.

—Compiled by staff writer

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TURNING STONE CASINO/STATE



The Marx

Turning Stone

Here is a look at The Marx hotel and the Turning Stone hotel and how they compare on fire safety.

LOCATION	
Syracuse	Verona
INSPECTIONS	
By city codes officer every 5 years	Exempt from state safety regulations. Nation officials say insurance company representative and Turning Stone's safety director perform regular inspections and reviews
INSURANCE SERVICE OFFICE RATING*	
1	5
DISTANCE FROM NEAREST FIRE STATION	
0.4 mile	2.4 miles
MANPOWER/EQUIPMENT (1st CALL)	
28 on-staff firefighters, three engines, 135-foot ladder truck (reaches 10 stories), two 95-foot ladder trucks, three rescue trucks	44 volunteers with varying availability; five fire engines, two rescue trucks, one tanker truck, a borrowed air van truck for refilling air bottles
ADDITIONAL MANPOWER/EQUIPMENT	
78 firefighters are on duty at all times, additional engines and ladder trucks would arrive from other stations if necessary; more than 300 off-duty firefighters could be called in before departments from neighboring, suburban departments are dispatched	About 80 volunteer and paid firefighters from stations 3 1/2 to 10 1/2 miles away are called for in the mutual response plan; ladder trucks and additional engines would arrive from other departments if necessary
SPRINKLERS, SMOKE DETECTORS, FIRE ALARMS, FIRE WALLS AND DOORS	
Yes	Yes
NUMBER OF ROOMS	
280	287
STAIRWAYS	
2	2

Sources: Yahoo! Maps, hotel officials, fire chiefs The Post-Standard

Suozzi opens campaign for governor

The Associated Press

Glen Cove — Democrat Tom Suozzi opened his upstart campaign for governor Saturday, casting himself as a take-no-prisoners reformer and seasoned executive better suited to shaking up the political establishment than his opponent, Attorney General Eliot Spitzer.

Surrounded by family on a stage in a chilly lot next to his grandparents' home in suburban Long Island, Suozzi, the Nassau County executive and former Glen Cove mayor, vowed to change the "culture of Albany" by reducing property taxes, boosting funding for low-income schools and cutting waste from the state's \$46 billion Medicaid system.

He insisted his credentials as a chief executive better prepared him to manage the complex task of transforming state government than Spitzer.

Suozzi, 43, is no stranger to long-shot campaigns.

He's been twice elected to his post in Nassau County, long a Republican stronghold. He's won praise for his management of the county and for his 2004 FixAlbany campaign, exposing state Albany campaign, exposing what he called a dysfunctional state Legislature. That effort led to the defeat of a Nassau County state Assembly member.

Little known outside his native Long Island and badly trailing Spitzer in polls and fundraising, Suozzi is seeking the mantle of a scrappy political outsider standing up to the bloated status quo.

DeWitt fire chief: High-rise fires need many firefighters fast

DEWITT, FROM PAGE A-14

Tom Laurin, who participated in the 2003 conversations that led to the resort's emergency response plan, is skeptical about those manpower expectations.

"A lot of it depends on volunteers," he said. "My only concern is: Is the response going to be there?"

Volunteer response is limited by the distance those firefighters must travel when the call is sounded, and by whether they are at work or otherwise unavailable.

Because of work and other commitments, volunteer firefighters in western Oneida County are so scarce that the Sheriff-Kenwood, Vernon, Vernon Center and Oneida Castle departments have an automatic response plan for fire-related emergencies that immediately dispatches two agencies while the others remain on standby.

Syracuse is the only other Central New York fire department responsible for buildings as large as those at the Turning Stone complex. If the Syracuse department were to respond to a blaze at the 20-story Marx hotel, 28 firefighters would be expected to arrive at the scene in under three minutes, said Deputy Fire Chief Jeff Daly. Another 50 on-duty firefighters and nearly 300 off-duty firefighters are available if more help is needed.

Chiefs in suburban Onondaga County departments say a high-rise fire in a 20-story hotel re-

"At least 50 people on scene to start is crucial. . . . Keep in mind 30 minutes from then you'll need to double the amount of manpower."

—Gary MacLachlan, DeWitt fire chief

quires a guaranteed, immediate response far beyond what's laid out in Turning Stone's emergency plan. DeWitt Chief Gary MacLachlan and East Syracuse Chief Joe McAllister estimate they'd need 100 firefighters in the first half-hour alone.

"You need a huge amount of manpower," said MacLachlan, whose mostly volunteer department is supplemented with paid professionals. "At least 50 people on scene to start is crucial. . . . Keep in mind 30 minutes from then you'll need to double the amount of manpower."

He said every firefighter in action should have another firefighter outside waiting to replace him or her when their air bottles run low. Most air bottles will last 20 or 30 minutes, and many departments limit their firefighters to two trips per fire because of the intense heat, smoke exposure and physical trauma that comes with hauling heavy equip-

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