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### Eatery nearly ready to reopen after fire

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When Lynn Lavia's fourth-grade class filed into her Holy Trinity elementary classroom May 7, some of her students told her they had been instructed to "be nice to Mrs. Lavia today. She'll be sad because Christopher's burned last night."

Lavia's ties to the restaurant run deep. She grew up in Beavertdale with the Giudicessi family that owns Christopher's restaurant and she dined there several times each week.

She is one of hundreds of Christopher's customers who have spent the summer without their regular fix of Italian-American food and neighborhood socializing.

"We don't know where to go now," Lavia said. "And now we have to cook."

Not for much longer. Christopher's, at 2816 Beaver Ave., hopes to reopen next week.

A May 6 fire started with the spontaneous combustion of a load of towels taken out of a dryer. The rear of the building was burned. At first, the Giudicessis thought they would be able to reopen in a couple of weeks. Those hopes faded as they learned the extent of smoke damage. Black grime percolated through the ducts, coating walls, ceilings and furniture in the bar and dining rooms. B.J. Giudicessi estimated damage at \$300,000.

Joe and Red Giudicessi, their children Ron, B.J. and RenI, along with restaurant employees and construction workers, spent the summer repairing the damage. The floor plan is the same, but the color scheme is new. Booths are burgundy instead of blue the chair seats cloth instead of vinyl. Coolers, compressors in refrigeration equipment, flooring, carpet and ceiling tiles also had to be replaced.

RenI Giudicessi said she has felt like a fish out of water. She is usually the hostess, greeting customers with a "Hello, honey," or a hug.

For her as well as the regulars, Christopher's is a social center. Customers drop in not only to eat, but also to see friends. The restaurant keeps people in touch.

The Giudicessis bought Christopher's in 1963. Red Giudicessi estimates they added to the original small building six times.