

# News Stories for Game 4: Smoke Alarms (3/1/2025)

## Evan Lawson: A Life Cut Short, A Legacy of Compassion

[Blue Ridge Observer \[Newspaper\] — 2/25/2025 at 7:58 AM](#)

Evan Lawson, son of Mayor Cecilia Lawson, passed away unexpectedly on February 18th, at the age of 28. Born and raised in Asheville, Evan was a vibrant and compassionate figure, leaving a lasting mark on the city he called home.

Evan's life was defined by a fierce commitment to social justice and a deep-seated empathy for those in need, a trait perhaps inspired by his late uncle, renowned journalist Casey Lawson, whose recent passing deeply affected Evan. Following in his uncle's footsteps, Evan pursued a journalism degree from UNC Chapel Hill, honing his skills for truth-seeking and impactful storytelling. However, his desire to make a direct difference led him to dedicate himself to service, volunteering with the Peace Corps in Uruguay and Honduras, where he worked tirelessly to improve the lives of those less fortunate. Upon returning to Asheville, he continued his work with local charities, becoming a familiar face at the Asheville food bank and dedicating countless hours to feeding the homeless. He was a vocal advocate for progressive causes, often found supporting those most vulnerable in the community.

Evan was also defined by his impatience for change. He was driven by a burning desire to make the world a better place, and he often expressed frustration with the slow pace of progress. He believed in direct action and wasn't afraid to challenge the status quo, frequently delivering impassioned spoken word performances at local open mics and community events, using his voice to amplify the concerns of the marginalized and demand immediate action.

Evan's sudden departure leaves a void in the hearts of his family, friends, and the community he so passionately served. He is survived by his mother, Mayor Cecilia Lawson, and a wide circle of loved ones. Details regarding a memorial service will be announced in the coming days. In lieu of flowers, the family requests that donations be made to the Asheville Homeless Coalition, in honor of Evan's unwavering dedication to supporting the most vulnerable members of our community.

While his life was tragically short, Evan Lawson's legacy will live on through the countless lives he touched and the causes he championed. He will be remembered for his unwavering compassion, his infectious energy, his impatience for positive change, and his unwavering belief in the power of community.

## Arson Attempt at Historic Grove Park Inn Foiled; Minor Damage Reported

[Blue Ridge Observer \[Newspaper\] — 2/25/2025 at 5:56 PM](#)

Asheville, NC – A late-night arson attempt at the iconic Grove Park Inn was thwarted early this morning, leaving behind minor damage and prompting an investigation by local authorities. The incident occurred around 2:00 AM, when a small fire was reported on the hotel's grounds.

Responding quickly, the Asheville Fire Department extinguished the blaze, which caused minimal damage to an exterior section of the building. Hotel security personnel were credited with initially containing the fire and alerting emergency services.

"We are grateful for the swift response of our security team and the Asheville Fire Department," stated a Grove Park Inn spokesperson. "Thanks to their efforts, the damage was contained, and no guests or staff were injured."

While the exact cause of the fire is still under investigation, authorities have confirmed that it was intentionally set. "Evidence at the scene indicates this was an act of arson," said a representative from the Asheville Police Department. "We are currently reviewing security footage and interviewing witnesses to determine the identity of the perpetrator or perpetrators."

This arson attempt marks the latest in a series of similar incidents that have plagued Asheville businesses in recent months. The string of fires began with the Downtown Book and News store, followed by smaller incidents at several other local establishments. This pattern has caused growing concern among business owners and residents, prompting increased patrols and heightened vigilance.

The escalating series of arson attempts has triggered a wave of concern among Asheville residents, who are now pressuring the City Council to take immediate action. Frustrated by the perceived lack of progress in apprehending the perpetrators, many residents are demanding increased funding for law enforcement, enhanced security measures for local businesses, and a more visible police presence throughout the city.

In a show of coordinated effort, the Asheville Police Department has confirmed that they are working hand-in-hand with the Grove Park Inn's security team to investigate the incident. This collaborative approach aims to leverage the hotel's internal resources and security expertise in conjunction with the police department's investigative capabilities.

The incident has raised concerns about the security of the historic landmark, which is a popular destination for tourists and locals alike. The Grove Park Inn has assured the public that they are cooperating fully with the investigation and are reviewing their security protocols.

"The safety of our guests and staff is our top priority," the hotel spokesperson emphasized. "We are taking this incident very seriously and are working to ensure that such an event does not happen again."

The investigation is ongoing, and authorities are urging anyone with information about the arson attempt to come forward.

## Local Firefighter Arrested on Arson Charges

[Blue Ridge Observer \[Newspaper\] — 2/26/2025 at 6:33 PM](#)

Asheville, NC - Police have arrested Michael Kiedrzynek on four felony arson charges. The arrest follows public outcry over what locals feared was a serial arsonist.

Kiedrzynek has been with the Asheville Fire Department for three years, and was stationed at the West Asheville fire station. He graduated from UNCA with a degree in computer science during the pandemic, and “signed up to be a fire fighter to help his community” according to his social media posts from that time.

“Michael Kiedrzynek is currently suspended, consistent with AFD policy,” said a county spokesperson. “ADF cannot comment on an individual ongoing criminal investigation. All firefighters go through extensive background checks before and during their service to our community.”

The Grand Bohemian Hotel, Grove House, the Grove Park Inn, and at least one private residence appear to have been targeted by a serial arsonist in recent nights. Although police have not detailed the pattern, locals quickly deduced that the fires were related.

The local community is now afraid that their taxes will go up as a result of this. “Any insurance company will tell you that exposure to risk increases costs,” says Arlo Alexander, an insurance agent based in Weaverville. “Now that the AFD has seen that one of their own is an [alleged] arsonist, the insurance companies are going to factor that in.”

## Fire at Innsbrook Mall Part of Safety Exercise

[Blue Ridge Observer \[Newspaper\] — 2/27/2025 at 7:06 AM](#)

Asheville, NC - Utility workers started a controlled fire at the Innsbrook Mall off of Tunnel Rd this week, and the building owners are suing the city.

The controlled burn was part of a safety exercise to demonstrate the risks of exposed wiring. The burn was originally scheduled to be at a demonstration site set up by Asheville Fire Department, but it was moved to the mall at the last minute.

No injuries were reported, but property damage is estimated to be in the thousands of dollars.

## Local Music Scene Rocked by Bold Heist at Citizen Vinyl

[Blue Ridge Observer \[Newspaper\] — 2/27/2025 at 6:08 PM](#)

\*Asheville, NC\* – The city’s music scene is abuzz following a brazen break-in at Citizen Vinyl, the popular downtown record store and vinyl record manufacturing facility. Authorities are investigating the incident, which resulted in the theft and destruction of a significant quantity of vinyl records, studio equipment, and specialized vinyl and tape manufacturing equipment.

According to preliminary reports, the perpetrators gained entry late last night, bypassing the building's security systems. Once inside, they reportedly ransacked the premises, destroying a large portion of the store's record stock. Sources close to the investigation suggest that the destruction was deliberate, indicating a targeted attack rather than a random act of vandalism.

"It was a scene of utter chaos," stated one anonymous source familiar with the investigation. "Records were smashed, equipment was damaged... it was clear that whoever did this wanted to send a message."

The theft of the manufacturing equipment has raised concerns among local music enthusiasts, as Citizen Vinyl is one of the few facilities in the region capable of producing vinyl records. The loss of this equipment and studio space could have a significant impact on the local music scene.

This latest incident comes on the heels of a string of recent fires and thefts plaguing Greater Asheville businesses, prompting Mayor Cecilia Lawson to take decisive action. In an emergency proposal slated for review mid-March by the City Council, Mayor Lawson announced plans to revitalize and bolster security measures for local businesses.

"We will not tolerate these acts of vandalism and theft," declared Mayor Lawson in a press conference earlier today. "We are committed to protecting our downtown businesses and ensuring the safety of our community. This emergency proposal will provide increased funding for night patrols and city-wide security upgrades, sending a clear message that criminal activity will not be tolerated in Asheville."

Law enforcement officials are currently interviewing witnesses in an effort to identify the perpetrators. They are also investigating possible connections to criminal organizations, as the incident bears the hallmarks of an organized crime. The sheer size and weight of the stolen vinyl record press, estimated to be several tons, suggests a well-organized operation involving a substantial crew and specialized equipment.

The incident has sent shockwaves through the Asheville community, raising concerns about the safety of local businesses. Citizen Vinyl has declined to comment on the ongoing investigation.

## [AVL Fringe \[Podcast\] — 2/28/2025 at 8:04 AM](#)

Host: "Welcome back, listeners, to another episode from the FringeCast. This episode comes from the archives, because we're still on winter break. It was originally released in July of 2019. Enjoy the show."

*Distorted audio effects and a heavily re-verbed male voice saying "Truth from the archives of the FringeCast" fade into sounds of city traffic.*

ED: "Isn't this chicken scary?" *Uncomfortable laughter.* "I mean it, look! This thing is basically a dinosaur. Imagen a chicken this big."

Host: "FringeCaster Ed Douglas is giving me a tour of Chicken Alley, one the most mystical and mysterious places in downtown Asheville. For years, occultists have uncovered layer after layer of the unsolvable, only find more unsolvable layers."

ED: "The woman who painted this mural is on record as not remembering ever painting it, and when asked about it, she gets anxious. You can see it in her body language, the way she holds her hands. It's clear that she had a sense of an opening, or an abscess, like there was some space that she couldn't access but that she could fall into. But all the artist remembers is getting the check from a local law firm."

Host: "Amnesiac painters are just the tip of the iceberg. Over the years, revelers have reported strange sounds, police reports have gone mysteriously missing when they relate to the alley, and empirical evidence shows us that there's far more going on here than gramable garage doors."

ED: "So the temperature here on the sidewalk is 13.3 degrees Celsius, and we're showing an EMF reading of about 1.2, but when we go into the alley we see the temperature drop," *muffled surprise from just inside the microphone's range*, "and the EMF numbers double, but these are logarithmic so it's really more like it goes up 100 fold. It's just off the charts."

Host: "We dive into Chicken Alley, Asheville's Abscess of the Abyss and more on this episode of the FringeCast."

*Cue intro theme music.*

## "Dark Selina" Soars: The Hex's Uncertain Future Fuels Collectors' Frenzy

[Land of the Sky News Network \[Tabloid News\] — 2/28/2025 at 4:54 PM](#)

The Asheville music scene is reeling from the shockwaves of The Hex's sudden upheaval. Lead singer Zephyr's abrupt departure has left fans and fellow musicians stunned, with rumors swirling about the band's future. While the remaining members have vowed to continue playing gigs with a new, yet-to-be-revealed vocalist, the loss of Zephyr's unique presence casts a long shadow.

Adding fuel to the fire, the recent ransacking of Citizen Vinyl, where the master tracks for their debut album "Dark Selina" were reportedly destroyed, has turned the album into an instant collector's item. "It's a double whammy," says local record store owner and collector, Dale Michaels. "The band's in turmoil, the masters are gone, and everyone wants a piece of that history. We're seeing prices skyrocket."

"Dark Selina," initially released locally to critical acclaim but modest sales, is now commanding exorbitant prices on online marketplaces and in local shops when collectors are lucky enough to even find it. The album's haunting melodies and Zephyr's enigmatic vocals, once readily available, are now a coveted treasure, a testament to the band's uncertain future and the ephemeral nature of artistic creation.

The Hex, and "Dark Selina" specifically, were at the forefront of Asheville's burgeoning Nocturne Rock scene. This genre, a darkly atmospheric blend of post-punk, gothic rock, and electronic elements, has quickly become a defining sound for the city's underground music culture. Its introspective lyrics, driving rhythms, and ethereal soundscapes have resonated with a growing audience seeking something beyond the mainstream. The Hex's sudden instability has left many wondering if this new genre will survive.

The circumstances surrounding Zephyr's disappearance are shrouded in mystery, fueling rampant speculation. Their last show with Zephyr, a packed performance mid-month at Vincent's Ear, is now being dissected for clues by intrigued fans. Theories abound, with many believing Zephyr was being stalked by increasingly obsessive fans, leading to unsettling encounters. More sinister fan theories posit that Zephyr's departure was not voluntary. The band has remained tight-lipped, offering no official explanation, further deepening the enigma surrounding their former frontwoman.

While the future of The Hex remains shrouded in mystery, one thing is certain: the legacy of "Dark Selina" and the impact of Zephyr's departure will continue to reverberate through the Asheville music scene for years to come.

*One of the many of the online marketplace listings for the Dark Selina Album, by various sellers and collectors.*

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## Mall of the Damned

### [AVL Fringe \[Podcast\] — 3/1/2025 at 10:04 AM](#)

((Podcast begins with creepy, atmospheric intro music, fading slightly under the host's voice))

Host: Alright, listeners, buckle up. Tonight, we're diving deep into the heart of darkness – or rather, the heart of Greater Asheville's very own Innsbrook Mall. Built in '66, Innsbruck was Asheville's first modern enclosed mall. Now, it's a decaying husk, a skeletal reminder of a bygone era. But this ain't your average ghost story. We're talking something way more sinister.

We've got reports of shadows dancing in empty corridors, electronics going haywire, a general sense of dread that hangs heavy in the air. Local kids dare each other to sneak past the barred and chained doorways, whispering tales of what they've seen – or felt – inside. It's become a haven for clandestine parties, fueled by cheap booze and the thrill of trespassing in a forbidden place. Graffiti covers the walls, the remnants of bonfires litter the floors, and the air is thick with the ghosts of teenage rebellion. But these gatherings have taken a darker turn. Whispers of disappearances have begun to surface, kids who went into the mall and never came out. One name in particular keeps coming up – a young man, barely 18, who vanished without a trace

after a party a few weeks back. The police have no leads, but the whispers in the darkness tell a different story. Some of the kids who've ventured into the mall, even those who've made it back, talk about... visions. Of the mall transforming, hallways stretching into infinity, empty storefronts becoming labyrinthine mazes that go on seemingly forever. They describe a sense of being lost, not just in the physical mall, but in something... else. Something vast and empty. It's said that sometimes, during these parties, some of the kids... they don't just see the spirit world. They get pulled into it, trapped in the mall's spectral reflection.

And speaking of stories, did you hear about the fire? Just this month, a blaze erupted in the lobby near the escalators. Fire department couldn't find the cause, but they haven't ruled out arson. Strange, considering the place is supposed to be deserted. Or is it?

Digging into the archives, we found some interesting tidbits. Old newspaper clippings from the '70s mention strange occurrences – unexplained power outages, items disappearing from stores, even a few unsettling reports of... well, let's just say "unusual sightings" in the mall's early days. One article from '78 talks about a "palpable sense of avarice" felt by several shop owners, a feeling that the mall itself was... yearning. Yearning for something. Profit, perhaps?

We even delved into the mall's ownership records. Let's just say they're... obscure. A tangled web of shell corporations and holding companies. It's like trying to trace the shadow of a ghost. But we've discovered hints of a cabal of investors, their names shrouded in secrecy, pulling the strings from behind the scenes. And get this – every attempt to revitalize the mall, to rebuild, to repurpose the land, has been met with... resistance. Plans fall through, investors back out, permits get denied. It's like the mall itself is fighting to stay abandoned. Or maybe, something wants it that way.

Locals we questioned in the occult community called it a "conduit for the otherworldly." A conduit. This once-happy shopping center is now a portal. But to what? Could this actually be the infamous "Greater Asheville Vortex"?

Whispers of entities, something lurking, growing stronger. The mall's decline is feeding it. It's a twisted symbiotic relationship, and we're the unlucky bystanders. We've heard whispers, too, not just of shadows and dread, but of... bargains. Of whispers in the empty stores, offering deals too good to be true. Deals that come with a price. Some say these aren't just bargains, they're Faustian contracts. And those who accept them often find themselves paying a debt they never imagined.

Have you been to Innsbruck's desolate parking lot lately? Peered into the barred doors? Seen anything strange? Heard anything unusual? Heard any deals whispered on the wind? Call our hotline, hit us up on socials. The more eyes on this, the better. The more customers... the better.