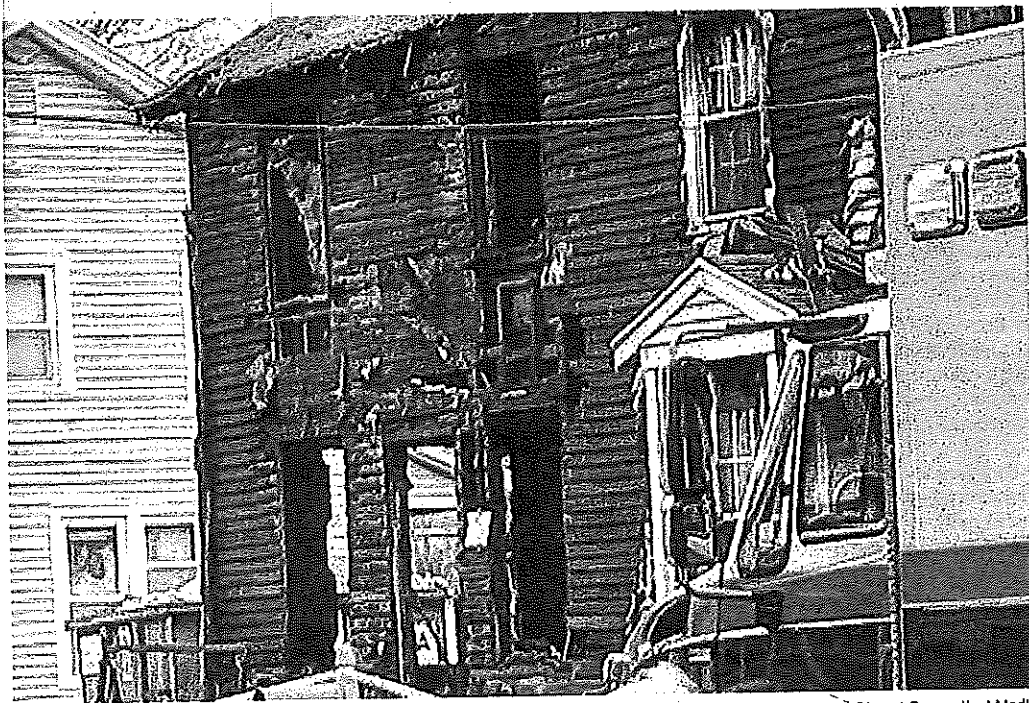


Journal Inquirer

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4 children die in Somers fire



Christine Dempsey/Hearst Connecticut Media

A fire investigator looks out the window of a Somers house Wednesday where four children died in a fire the night before.

3 others were injured, one with serious burns, officials say

By Jessica Bravo, Christine Dempsey and Susan Danseyar

STAFF WRITERS

SOMERS — Four children were killed and three others were injured, one seriously, in a Tuesday night fire that destroyed a two-family home and rocked a small north-central Connecticut community.

"It's a tremendous loss for the town," Somers First Selectman Timothy Keeney said. "It's going to take us a long time to get over this."

The children who died were roughly between the ages of 5 and 12, according to Keeney. Their names and ages will not be released until their identities are confirmed through autopsies, officials said at a

Fire continues on 6

Former EH hotel slated to reopen in April

By Jamila Young
STAFF WRITER

EAST HARTFORD — Since a hotel building adjacent to Interstate 84 was left vacant in 2019, it has sat as an eyesore for commuters coming to and from Hartford. Not to mention for those visiting the UConn football team's nearby stadium, Rentschler Field.

But Gary Patel, asset manager for Kautilya East Hartford Hotel LLC out of New Jersey, hopes to bring new life to the building at 363 Roberts St., as he plans to reopen it in April as a Fairfield Inn & Towneplace Suites By Marriott.

Mayor Connor Martin said he is

Hotel continues on 5

State guidelines limit use of traffic cameras in poor areas

By John Moritz
STAFF WRITER

Connecticut towns seeking to use cameras to flag drivers for speeding and running red lights will have to meet certain conditions to do so, particularly in lower-income neighborhoods, state

Cameras continues on 8

SOMERS OFFICIALS
BACK SOLAR FARM

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FIRE

From page 1

news conference Wednesday afternoon. All four children attended local schools.

Keeney said he has lived in Somers his entire life and a fire that took four children's lives is "unprecedented, as far as I know."

Three surviving siblings — two children and one young adult — were injured in the blaze. One of them suffered serious burns, Somers Fire Chief John Roache said. A firefighter was treated at the hospital for a burn and was released, he said.

A litter of dogs died in the fire, Roache said.

Eight people in one family live on the left side of the Quality Avenue duplex, where the fire appears to have done the most damage. One adult wasn't home at the time.

The family living on the right side safely fled the house.

Connecticut State Police



Sue Danseyar/Hearst Connecticut Media

Four children were killed and others had serious injuries in a house fire on Quality Avenue in Somers Tuesday night, an official said.

Trooper First Class Pedro Muniz said the fire appeared to be accidental.

Roache was asked several times if a Christmas tree contributed to the fire. He said the

cause of the blaze remained unknown on Wednesday.

"It will take a while to investigate the fire," he said. "We'll be speaking to members of the family, some of whom are children."

Keeney said his family built the duplexes in the neighborhood more than 100 years ago to house mill workers.

Records show Quality Rentals LLC, which is based in Enfield, purchased the home in 2002 and owns several other duplexes on the street. Frank Troiano, who owns the company, could not be reached for comment Wednesday.

The age of the building helped the fire spread, officials said. Newer construction homes have fire stops, but this house did not and the flames quickly traveled, trapping people on the upper floors, officials said. The staircase was engulfed in flames, making it difficult for firefighters to reach the second floor, Roache said.

Firefighters eventually made their way through the flames and rescued people from the second and third floors, Roache said.

The house has been condemned by the fire marshal, Roache said.

When fire crews arrived, "the entire front of the house was engulfed with fire," Roache said. A dozen different fire departments helped fight the blaze, he said.

A woman who identified herself as a relative of the residents who lived on the right side of the duplex started a fundraiser to support the family as they "lost their home and all of their belongings" in the fire.

The family, consisting of two adults, three children and a dog, were able to escape the house unharmed, according to the fundraiser.

"They escaped their burning home with nothing but the pajamas they were wearing," she wrote on the fundraiser page. "They have a difficult and long journey ahead of them and could use a helping hand to get back on their feet."

State Sen. John A. Kissel, who represents Somers, described the deaths of the four young children as "absolutely heartbreaking."

"Our prayers go out to the victims, to their loved ones, to the fire personnel, and to everyone

in Somers," Kissel said. "This is such a tragedy, and as a state, we grieve collectively."

The superintendent's office for Somers Public Schools released a statement about how the district is handling the tragedy with students.

"Our counseling staff will provide support to students throughout the week as needed," the office said in a statement. "Our staff, students and families will support each other as we navigate this tragedy."

Roache said firefighters responded to reports of a fire at 10:30 p.m. Tuesday. Roache said crews had difficulty entering the back entrance, but after getting in, they made multiple rescues and he estimated about 11 people were trapped inside.

An unknown number of victims had "serious injuries" and were transported to the hospital, according to Roache. He said a 19-year-old trapped on the second floor had to jump out a window to escape the fire.

By daybreak Wednesday, the scene was eerily quiet and a Connecticut State Police fire marshal truck was parked outside.

The left side of the house sustained heavy damage and was charred. It appeared the fire destroyed the outside wall on the left side of the house.

Roache said the house was a total loss.

Members of the state police Fire and Explosion Investigation Unit are working with the local fire marshal to find the cause of the blaze.

Firefighters will begin coping with the gravity of the situation, Roache said at the news conference.

"We're still in response mode," he said. "It's going to hit us in the next 24 hours when we slow down."

The family is being helped by the American Red Cross and Somers Human Services, Muniz said.

Donations to help the families can also be made to the Somers Angel Fund, Town of Somers, 619 Main St., Somers, CT 06071, officials said.

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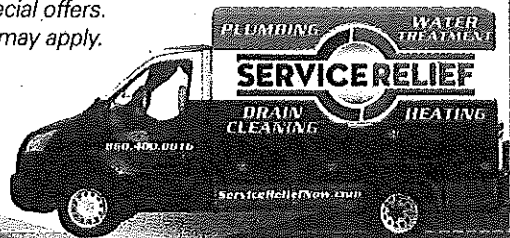
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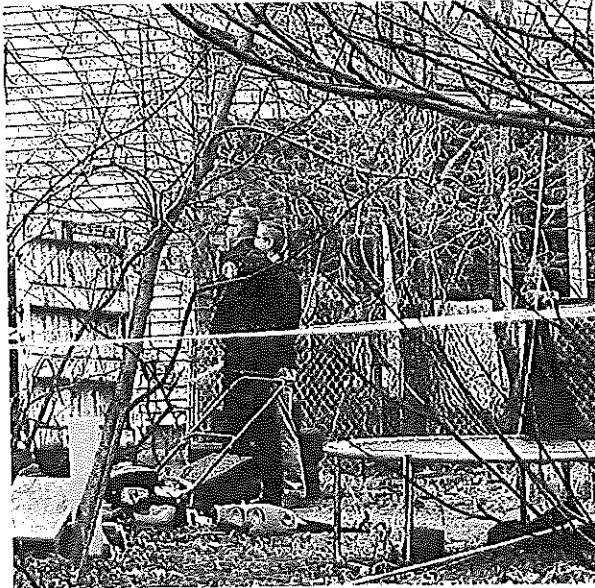


What we know and don't know about Somers house fire

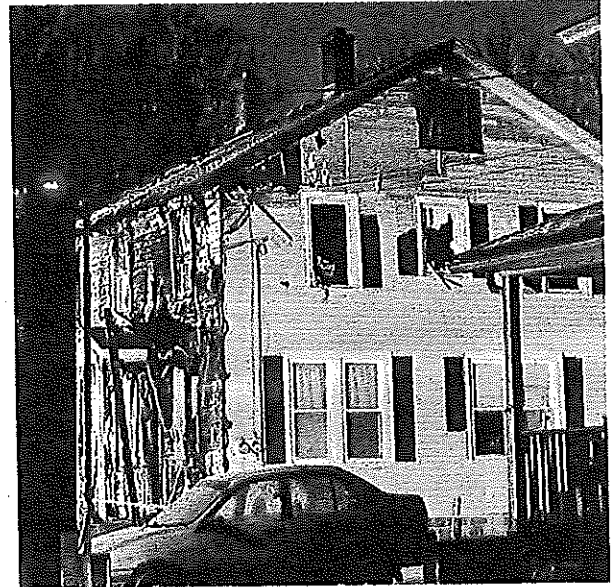
By Jessica Bravo
and Peter Yankowski
STAFF WRITERS

SOMERS — Four children were killed in what the town's first selectman called an "unprecedented" and "tremendous tragedy" Tuesday night.

The children, ranging in age from 5 to 12, died and several others were seriously injured in the blaze that destroyed a two-family duplex on Quality Avenue.



Sue Danseyar/Hearst Connecticut Media



Christine Dempsey/Hearst Connecticut Media

Police officers seen in taped-off area where a fatal fire took place on Quality Avenue in Somers overnight.

What we know:

Somers Fire Chief John Roache said Wednesday morning that a total of 11 people lived in the house, a two-family duplex.

The mother of the four children who died was not home at the time of the fire, according to First Selectman Timothy Keeney. He said a 19-year-old jumped from a second-story window to escape the fire.

Roache said firefighters rescued multiple victims from the fire when they arrived. He said some had "serious injuries" and were transported to local hospitals for treatment.

A GoFundMe page started by a cousin of the family whose four children died identified the victims by their first names. They were named Lucas, Benjamin, Archer and Genevieve, the page said. It did not provide the children's exact ages.

The fundraiser said the family had "suffered an unbearable loss."

The page said donations would go toward funeral expenses of the four children, as well as aid for the family to replace essentials and find a new place to live.

"We understand that not everyone may be able to contribute financially, and if that's the case, your thoughts and prayers are deeply appreciated," the cousin of the family, who identified herself as Jessica Marie, wrote on the fundraising page. "We are overwhelmed with gratitude for those who have already assisted — neighbors, first responders, emergency personnel and surrounding communities."

A family of two adults, three children and a dog who lived on the other side of the duplex survived the fire, according to a relative who started a GoFundMe fundraiser for them.

Keeney, a lifelong Somers resident, said his family built the duplexes more than 100 years ago to house mill workers.

What we don't know:

Roache said all of the residents of the home were accounted for as of Wednesday morning, but he didn't say how many people were inside when the fire erupted. Officials did not say how many people were hurt or the extent of their injuries.

Roache said the residents were "trapped" inside the home and firefighters had difficulty getting through the back entrance. It was not immediately clear whether the fire or something in the home impeded the residents from escaping and the firefighters from entering. Roache said crews had a difficult time getting into the house. He didn't elaborate on why, citing privacy concerns on divulging the layout of the home.

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Somers officials tentatively back solar farm proposed for 22 acres on South Road

By Susan Danseyar
STAFF WRITER

SOMERS — Town officials are generally in support of a proposed solar farm on South Road, though they say such an undertaking is complex and needs to be executed with abutting neighbors in mind.

Bridgeport-based Santa Fuel Inc. is proposing to build and operate a solar facility on property it would rent at 159 South Road, which would span 22.1 acres — about 13.75 acres of the property's existing hay field, 3.05 acres of undeveloped woodland, and 5.3 acres of the overgrown orchard. The property is part of a larger 108.5-acre parcel at 159 South Road owned by the Nancy B. Edgar Revocable Trust and Dianne Bordeaux Lenti.

Timothy Coon, an engineering consultant for J.R. Russo & Associates of East Windsor, said the northeastern portion of the property was formerly mined for

gravel and is now used as a hay field. He said the southeastern portion is undeveloped woodland; the southwestern portion consists of an old orchard that is no longer maintained; and an existing single-family home with a couple of barns and a former fruit stand are located adjacent to South Road on the western portion of the property.

The project will involve clearing 3.04 acres of trees in the southeast corner, including approximately 1.92 acres outside a perimeter fence for shade, Coon said. He said large trees will be removed outside the fence, but brush and stumps will remain to minimize soil disturbance and keep existing vegetation.

Construction would begin in this summer and is estimated to last four to six months.

The Connecticut Siting Council, which has jurisdiction over solar farms being built in the state, will be taking comments from the public about the proposal

during a remote public hearing Jan. 11 at 6:30 p.m. Anyone wishing to speak must sign up in advance.

First Selectman Timothy R.E. Keeney said that, to date, officials have had a good working relationship with Santa Fuel, and the exchange of dialogue has been positive.

In a Jan. 2 letter to Melanie Bachman, executive director of the Siting Council, Keeney said the town recognizes that projects such as Santa Fuel's "are vital" in achieving the state's efforts to meet its renewable energy goals. He outlined inter-action that officials have had with Santa Fuel that include the Conservation Commission's request that seed with a pollinator mix be used in any areas that might be disturbed and require re-seeding.

Keeney and senior members of his staff met with officials at the energy company in October and said they were concerned about abutting neighbors and potential noise from equipment, as well as

visibility of the panels.

Keeney also said the town agrees with comments made to the Siting Council by Paul Aresta, executive director of the state's Council on Environmental Quality. In a letter dated Sept. 28, Aresta wrote that the council recommends retaining topsoil and minimizing grading, trenching, and compaction of farm soil to allow restoring the land to its agricultural state.

The area east of the proposed project site is identified by the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection as forest habitat. Removal of edge forest could result in a reduction of core forest located further east of the site, Aresta said. He also suggests Santa Fuel plant native, deer-resistant evergreens to screen the facility on the southern side of the site.

Coon said in a Dec. 20 letter to the Siting Council that the proposed solar farm, over the course of a 25-year-lease, will produce rental income for the landowner. "When the solar array is removed from the property upon expiration of the lease, the prior agricultural use of the property can resume, if so desired," he said. "During its lifespan, the project will help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and pollutants."

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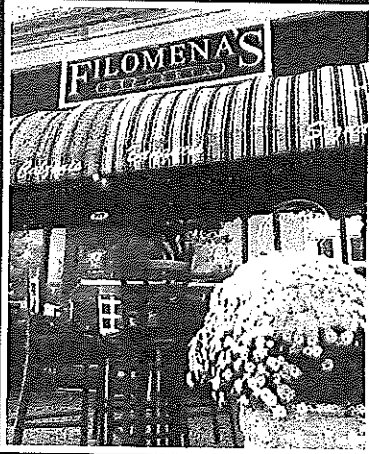
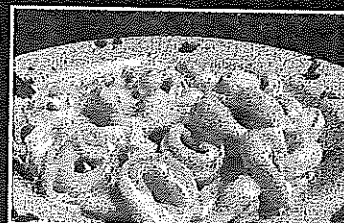
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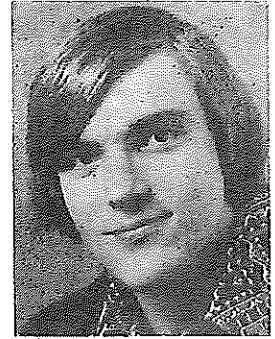
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Life Tributes

David Alan Voyer



David Alan Voyer, 64, son of Peter E. Voyer and Dorothy M. (Bulpitt) Voyer, passed away unexpectedly in Nashua, NH, on December 17, 2023. He was a graduate of Tolland High School and worked at a local machine shop as a CNC machine operator. He also worked at companies in Newton, MA, and Nashua, NH.

He was predeceased by his mother, Dorothy M. Voyer; and leaves his father, Peter E. Voyer, sister, Sharon A. Lavigne, nieces, Allison Lavigne, Rachel Lavigne, and nephew, Michael Lavigne, his fiancée, Stephanie Caruso, uncle, Paul J. Voyer, and many cousins and friends.

A remembrance service will be held at the Tolland Memorial Funeral Home, 375 Merrow Road, Tolland, CT, on Tuesday, January 9, 2024, from 9:00 to 10:30 a.m. A Funeral Mass will follow at St. Matthew Church,

111 Tolland Green, Tolland, CT, at 11:00 a.m. A private burial service will follow at St. Francis Cemetery, George Shaffer Lane, Wakefield, RI.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, 262 Danny Thomas Place, Memphis, TN 38105-3678, or to a charity of your choice. For online condolences, visit www.pietrasfuneralhome.com.

SOMERS Richard Clifford

TOLLAND David Alan Voyer

Obituary Information:
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Richard Clifford



Richard Clifford, aged 91, passed away, Thursday, December 28, 2023, after a long illness. He was born in Glasgow, Scotland, UK, on September 28, 1932. He earned a degree in Mechanical Engineering and was an accomplished draftsman. He served 2 years in the UK National Service, in Malaysia, in the Royal Army Service Corps, Intelligence Division. He moved to the United States in 1964 with his family. He was a member of the Sheet Metal Workers Union Local #40, Hartford, CT for over 50 years. Richard was passionate about the Ukulele and played for the Glastonbury Ukulele Club for 15 years.

He was predeceased by his parents, Edward and Catherine (Cunningham) Clifford, 2 brothers, Jack Cronin and Edward Clifford.

He is survived by his wife Mary C. (McMahon) Clifford, his daughters, Elaine Clifford and Annette Clifford Bowes

and his 2 granddaughters, Nicole L. Mitchell and Eliza M. Bowes, his 2 sisters, Maureen Johnson of Anne Arbor Michigan and Veronica Clifford of London, UK.

Richard's family wishes to thank all members of Chestnut Hill, East Longmeadow, Massachusetts, for his care and well-being during his illness. All Services will be held privately at the convenience of the family. For online condolences, please visit Somersfuneralhome.com

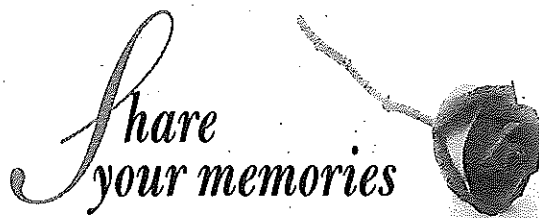
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Memorial gifts honor loved ones Community foundation

Families can focus on something their loved one cared deeply about, such as animal rescue, children, the arts, or even particular places in a community - such as a local park. According to CarePages, a company that produces free patient websites and offers community support for those coping with illness, families can choose to have their donations funneled to specific charities or nonprofit groups. Otherwise, funds can be allocated to a third party community fund that will distribute money to various organizations no matter where they are located.

The loss of a friend or loved one is seldom easy, particularly if a person had been suffering from an illness. Close friends and family honor the memories of their deceased loved ones in different ways. Charitable giving can be a great way to honor a loved one's memory while helping others.

Survivors often find comfort in the knowledge that they can do good in the name of a loved one. Tributes or memorial gifts can be approached in different ways and serve as an ongoing reminder of a deceased loved one.



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