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Children in fatal fire ID'd

Officials: Somers youths trapped when fire started at bottom of stairs

By Christine Dempsey
STAFF WRITER

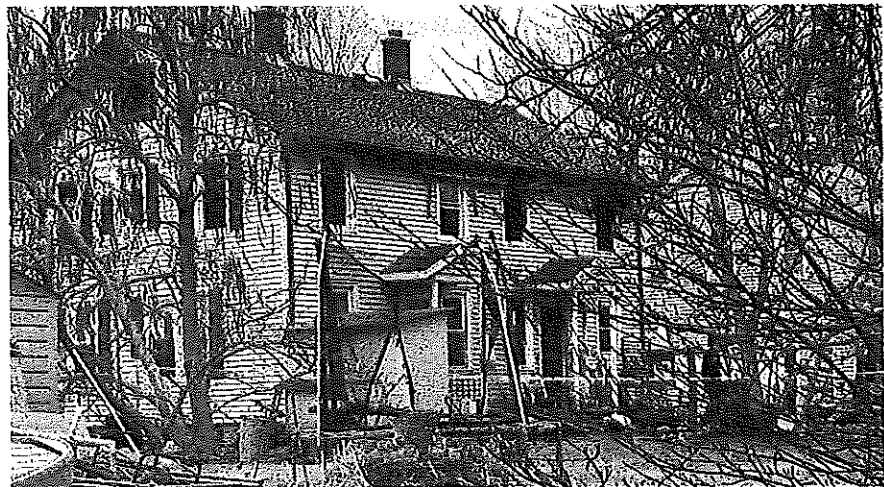
SOMERS — Officials have identified the four children who died in a fast-moving fire Tuesday night and determined it started at the bottom of the stairs, blocking their exit.

Inside

• Joanna's fundraiser, A7
Lukas Koropatkin, 11,
Genevieve Koropatkin, 9,
Benjamin Koropatkin, 7,
and Archer Koropatkin, 5, were killed in the fire at 44 Quality Ave., a spokesperson with the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner said Friday. The children died of smoke inhalation and burns, and their deaths were ruled an accident.

The fire killed the four youngest children — all students of Somers Public

Fire continues on A8



Four children were killed and others were injured in a house fire on Quality Avenue in Somers Tuesday night, officials say. This is a view of the duplex from the back yard.

Sue Danseyar/Hearst Connecticut Media

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By Peter Ya
STAFF WRITER

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Why some Conn. highway exit signs are out of

By Eric Bedner
STAFF WRITER

WINDSOR LOCKS — Early on in our schooling, we are taught that the number 41 naturally comes after number 40. But on Interstate 91 near Bradley International Airport, that is certainly not the case.

The strange numbering of exits has likely confused plenty of drivers on that stretch of high-

way over the last 30 years.

The odd sequence is the result of officials attempting to consider how confusing changes might be to users of paper maps — which were once the only option, of course, before technology allowed drivers to interact with their phones and other devices as they drove.

Nonsequential exit numbers on some state highways, the result of technology used at the

time of construction, are gradually being made more clear as the state moves toward mileage-based exits.

Still, two of the most quirky exits on Connecticut highways remain. Both I-91 and I-84 in the central part of the state have prime examples.

Exits 41 and 39 in Windsor Locks in both directions of I-91 are just one exit, and lead to a

Exit continues on A6



Eric Bedner

The off-ramp for exits 39 and 41 on Interstate 91 before Exit 40, which connects the highway to Bradley International Airport.

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FIRE

From page A1

Schools — and injured the three older siblings, one seriously. The surviving three sisters, including a 19-year-old with serious burns on her hands, have been released from the hospital, Somers Fire Chief John Roache said. The mother was out of the home at work at the time of the fire.

Town helping family

The town worked with family members to help them find a place to stay and to provide other things they need, Human Services Director Matt Cox said Thursday.

Residents and others have been donating clothes and money to a town fund (Angel Fund, 619 Main St. Somers, CT 06071) and to GoFundMe accounts, and "Somers Strong" signs and T-shirts have been popping up around this town of 10,000 on the Massachusetts line.

"The family is together," Roache said. "The hard part now is just processing."

In addition to eight people living on the left side of the duplex, there were two cats and 10 dogs, including two litters of puppies, Roache said. Three puppies got out on their own or were rescued.

Two older dogs are unaccounted for and may have run away in the commotion, although it's possible they died in the fire and firefighters couldn't see their bodies in the rubble, he said.

Just in case, Roache said, "I know the residents in the neighborhood are keeping an eye out."

The fire was reported about 10:20 p.m. Tuesday. When firefighters arrived — within five minutes — the entire front of the house was in flames, officials said. The fire wasn't placed under control until almost 1 a.m. Wednesday, and by that time, crews had removed two children, one of whom died at the scene and the other

at Johnson Memorial Hospital. Two more were in the charred house overnight.

Investigators determined the fire started in a roughly 3-by-3-foot area at the bottom of the stairs on the first floor, where the living room is and where, like in many homes, "there's a million things plugged in," Roache said.

"Unfortunately, it was right at the bottom of the stairs," he said. "That's just a tragic circumstance." Anyone who was upstairs wouldn't have been able to use the stairway to get out.

Three of the children who died were found on the second floor and one was found on the first, Roache said.

There was "too much fire right in that area" for the child to get out the front door, he said, and the back door was blocked by the kitchen table.

Despite rumors that the fires started where a Christmas tree stood, Roache said, "we didn't find anything that indicated a Christmas tree was in that area."

Cause being investigated

The next step is for insurance investigators, who include engineers, to try to pinpoint the precise cause of the fire.

Roache said the insurance company will want to know, "Was it the power strip, was it a battery?" And if the fire started in a power cord, was it defective or "did a cat chew it?"

Despite the fact it appears to have started in an area where electronics were plugged in, it's too early to say the fire was electrical in nature, he said.

Insurance investigators likely will remove parts of the house where the fire started, Roache said.

"The insurance company will probably cut that whole chunk of the room out," he said, and take it to a lab.

That process can take months, Roach said, and it's possible engineers and other investigators will never know the precise cause.

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Somers community comes together for fundraiser

Proceeds will benefit family whose members died in house fire Tuesday

By Susan Danseyar
STAFF WRITER

SOMERS — Residents are still laden with heavy hearts over the deaths of four children during a fire this week but came together in force to hear music, bond with neighbors, and donate to a fundraiser Friday night for the two families affected by Tuesday night's fire.

They came from Somers and surrounding towns to Joanna's Restaurant on Main Street to join Steel N Eazy, a local bluegrass and country band that organized an evening for the entire community to begin the healing process and raise money for the families.

The five members of the band will be donating their fee and tips to the Somers Angel Fund

that the town created to help support the families. Jeff Lipton, the restaurant's owner, will be donating \$1,000.

"This is our community," said "Bart" Keith Bartholomew, lead singer for the band. "When we heard what these families went through, we knew we had to step up."

The band, which performs at Joanna's about five or six times a year, was already scheduled to play on Friday, he said. "Then the tragedy happened and we were compelled to do something and thought what better place than here — close to where the fire happened and in a town that cares so much about its neighbors."

The other band members — Jack Chiasson, Tim Smith, Doug Graves, and Sam Gibson —

agreed with Bartholomew when he said that the evening was not about them, but rather people in need.

"We are using this night of playing as a tool for everyone to start to heal," Bartholomew said. "Lord, take them home," he said about the four children who died.

The band's impetus also came from their friend, Ken Smith of Tolland, whose house burned down a year ago, Bartholomew said. "When Ken heard about the families on Quality Avenue, it affected him deeply and he asked the band what we could do for the families," he said.

In addition, Smith volunteered to make sure the money raised Friday night will be given to the Angel Fund.

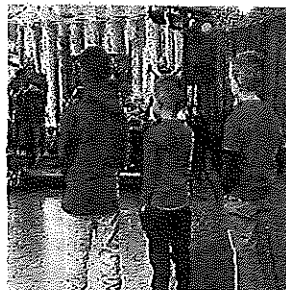
His family lost everything when a fire broke out in their house on Nov. 11, 2022, Smith said. "We had to completely rebuild the house from the ground

up," he said. "We just got back into it on Thanksgiving — about a year later."

Smith said his heart breaks for the families who lost their homes on Quality Avenue. "The loss of life is treacherous," he said. "And then — on top of that — they lost everything else," Smith said. "So this is my way to pay it forward."

Less than 24 hours after the fire broke out in a two-family house on Quality Avenue Tuesday night, the Somers community and surrounding towns began discussing ways they could help the families. Town officials have said outreach has been tremendous, with the collection of clothing, toiletries, dog food, and furniture for the families having already begun in earnest.

A spokesperson with the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner identified the children on Friday. Many have also sent



Susan Danseyar/Hearst Conn. Media

Joanna's Restaurant in Somers was standing room only on Friday night when a local band held a fundraiser for the victims of Tuesday night's fire.

sympathy messages to the families online, most lamenting that nothing can bring back Lukas Koropatkin, 11, Genevieve Koropatkin, 9, Benjamin Koropatkin, 7, and Archer Koropatkin, 5, who were killed in the fast-moving fire.

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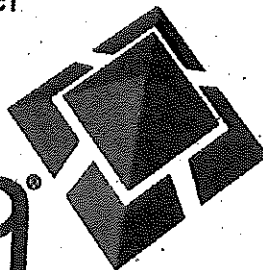
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