

# Journal Inquire

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## Fire victims remembered



Dave Zajac/Hearst Connecticut Media

People pray and reflect during a community prayer space offered Monday at Somers Congregational Church. The church provided an opportunity for the community to come together for a time of prayer and support following the fire where four children lost their lives.

### 'He saved lives': 5-year-old alerted siblings to fire

By Christine Dempsey  
STAFF WRITER

SOMERS — Four Somers children who died in a house fire last week will be remembered during visiting hours Thursday.

The family of Lukas, Genevieve, Benjamin and Archer Koropatkin will receive friends at the Leete-Stevens Enfield Chapels, 61 South Road in Enfield, starting at 5 p.m. Thursday.

The children ranged in age from 5 to 11 and all attended Somers Public Schools. Their deaths cut the family of eight in half, with the mother losing four of

*Victims continues on 7*

### Neighbors and friends gather at Somers church

By Eric Bedner  
STAFF WRITER

SOMERS — Members of the community gathered at Somers Congregational Church on Monday to partake in a quiet moment of reflection following a fire that resulted in the death of four children and rocked the community to its core.

The Rev. Scott Spence opened the sanctuary at the church to the public if they chose to come in for a quiet or contemplative prayer or talk to neighbors about their grief.

"It's an opportunity for folks that wish to do so for quiet

*Prayers continues on 6*

## State's evi rate up fro pre-pande levels, dat

By Alex Putterman  
STAFF WRITER

Evictions in Connecticut above pre-pandemic levels, shows, one of the latest signs of an ongoing housing crunch.

Of dozens of regions analyzed by Eviction Lab, a research center at Princeton University, Hartford counties ranked with the sharpest uptick in evictions. Connecticut saw fewer evictions in 2023 than more than in a typical year, the data showed.

"Things are beyond what we've seen before," said an Eviction

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## PRAYERS

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prayer and conversation," he said. "There's just so much that has gone on this week."

Firefighters responded to the 44 Quality Ave. duplex around 10:20 p.m. Jan. 2, as the entire front of the house was in flames, fire officials said.

Four children in one family ranging in age from 5 to 11 were trapped and died as a result of the fire.

With all of the commotion surrounding the tragedy, Spence said Monday was "an opportunity to be still."

"If we take a moment to pause, we realize how fortunate we are to be in a community like this," he said.

A small group of people of all ages filed into the sanctuary when doors opened, sitting silently with their thoughts or speaking privately with Spence.

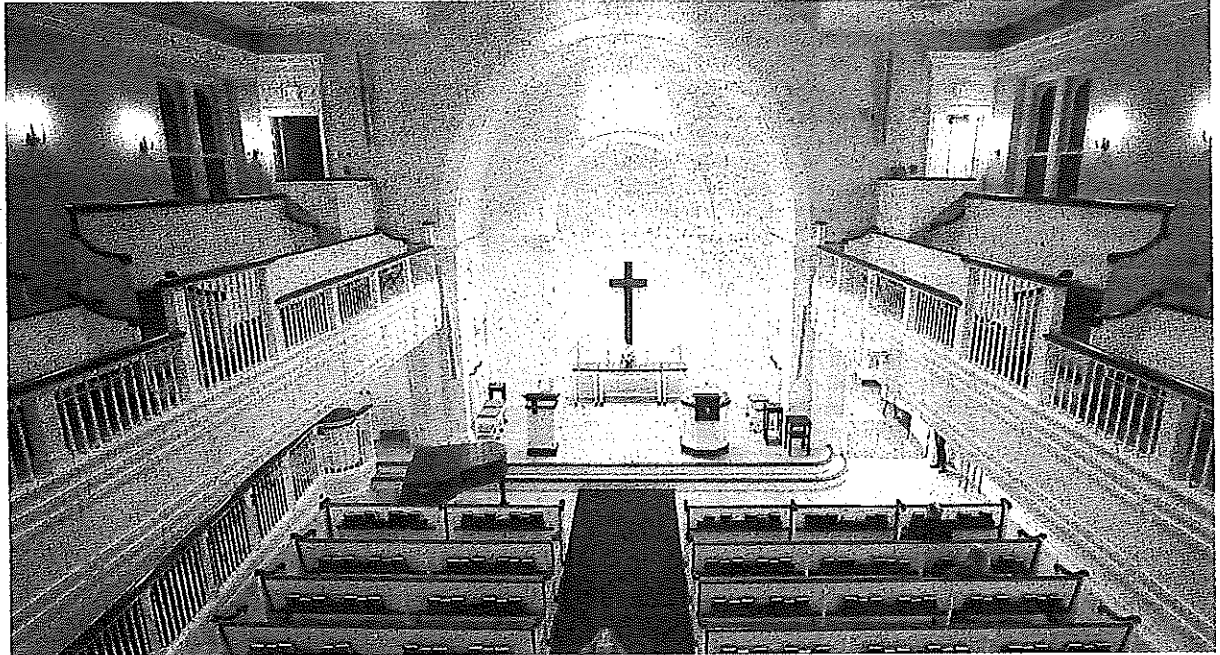
The pastor spoke briefly, explaining that the intent of the night was to allow the community to gather and reflect on the loss of neighbors and friends.

In a written welcome handed out to visitors, church officials said the community has been "united by grief," regardless of their faith or how long they've lived in town.

"We gather together in sadness over the loss of life from last week's house fire," it read. "We gather together to pray for the families affected. We gather to lift up in prayer the names of those who died: Lukas Koropatkin, Genevieve Koropatkin, Benjamin Koropatkin, Archer Koropatkin."

The church also offered prayers for the first responders of Somers and surrounding towns who were called to the fire.

Monday's gathering was just the most recent expression of support for the two families affected by the fire, as a fundraiser was held on Friday. "Somers Strong" signs have popped up throughout the community and people in and outside Connecticut have been donating a variety of items to help the families.



Dave Zajac/Hearst Connecticut Media

Deacon Carla Smith walks through the sanctuary of Somers Congregational Church during a community prayer offering Monday.

"I think it's a testament to what we have here" in Somers, Spence said.

The church is doing its part to help the families as well, donating from its funds to the town's Angel Fund.

Spence encourages others who wish to donate to also contribute to the Angel Fund as it is administered by the town and is the most cost-effective way to assist the families, he said.

"We continue to encourage people to support one another and be here for the family now and in the weeks and months to come," Spence said.

The setting of the Somers Congregational Church was a unique one as it was the scene of a fire that destroyed much of the church building in 2012.

Scott Nobel, an Enfield resident who attended Monday's prayer space, noted that as with the support for the families involved in last week's fire, the residents of Somers and surrounding towns offered support and helped to rebuild the 19th-century building.

"In that particular case, it was just a physical building loss," he said. "But in this case, it touches



A Somers Strong sign placed in front of Somers Congregational Church.

ever so deeply when you lose children and pets and many memories, and this church is one that really emphasizes be-

ing a community church."

Monetary donations to the Angel Fund can be mailed to 619 Main St., Somers, CT 06071.

Donations can also be made online through the town's Recreation and Leisure Services' portal.

## VICTIMS

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her seven children.

The oldest, Lukas, loved YouTube. His sister Genevieve was a "girly girl." Benjamin was an artist. And the youngest, Archer, was a ball of energy, a "daredevil," his family said in their obituaries.

It was Archer, who was 5, who alerted his older siblings to the fast-moving fire, according to his obituary.

"He saved lives that night," the obituary says.

The obit describes Archer, whose full name was Archer David Koropatkin, as "energetic and sweet."

"He loved Paw Patrol, white puppies, and spending time with his friends at Somers Elementary School," the obituary says. "He was a daredevil and knew how to ride a dirt bike before he knew how to ride a bicycle."

Benjamin, 7, also was described as sweet but was shy, his obituary says. He also was "creative and artistic." His full name was Benjamin Alan-Jon Koropatkin.

"He was known for making mosaic pictures with colored paper," the obit says. "He loved playing with Lego bricks, riding his scooter, drawing with crayons, markers and pencils, and spending time with his friends at Somers Elementary School."

Benjamin enjoyed hanging out with his siblings and playing the Nintendo video game, Super Smash Bros., the obituary says.

Genevieve Ann-Rose, 9, was described as the "princess of the Koropatkin kids."

"Gen was so beautiful, outgoing, clever, and talkative. She was a girly girl who loved anything sparkly, pink and purple, LOL dolls, Mini Brand dolls, doing her nails and makeup, and spending time with her friends at Somers Elementary School. She was high fashioned; she loved to wear jewelry and high heels," her obit says.

Lukas Ryan-Alan was 11. "He loved fishing, playing basketball, building with Lego bricks, Pokémon and spending time with his friends at Mabelle B. Avery Mid-



Susan Danseyar/Hearst Connecticut Media

A candlelight memorial honoring Lukas, Genevieve, Benjamin and Archer Koropatkin stands outside the charred home where a fire took the children's lives Jan. 2.

dle School," his obituary says.

"He loved YouTube and said he wanted to be a YouTuber. He also enjoyed hanging out with his siblings and playing Super Smash Bros."

The obituaries ask that instead of buying flowers, people help the family by donating to an online GoFundMe fundraiser set up by a relative.

The fund had raised \$38,000 as of Monday morning, surpassing its initial goal of \$30,000.

There has been an outpouring of support from the community, and other GoFundMe accounts have been set up as well, including one that raised \$95,000. In addition, the town has established the Angel Fund, 619 Main St., Somers, CT 06071.

Others have been donating everything from clothes to furniture to the family, who lost everything they owned. Three older siblings were able to get out of the burning house and survived the fire, although the oldest sister, a 19-year-old, had serious burns on her hands, Somers Fire Chief John Roache

said. The mother was working and was not home at the time of the fire.

A local bluegrass and country band that was scheduled to play at Joanna's Restaurant, around the block from the house that burned, decided to turn their Friday-night performance into a fundraiser and donate their fee and tips to the Angel Fund. In addition to Steel N Eazy's donation, the restaurant's owner said he gave \$1,000 to the fund.

### Flames spread fast

Firefighters were dispatched to the duplex at 44 Quality Ave. about 10:20 p.m. Jan. 2. The first arrived within five minutes and saw that the entire front of the house was in flames, fire officials said.

Three of the older sisters were able to get out of the burning house, as did all four of their neighbors who lived on the opposite side of the duplex. But four of the youngest siblings were trapped, the officials said.

Crews attempted rescues from the front and back of the home,

but weren't able to reach the children until they made a third try with an aerial ladder and got in through a second-floor window, fire officials said in a news release.

Firefighters removed two children, one of whom was pronounced dead at the scene. The second died at Johnson Memorial Hospital in Stafford, fire officials said. Two children were removed from the house the next day, one was on the first floor and the other was on the second.

Although a few were rescued, several pets died in the fire as well, the fire chief said. The family had two cats and 10 dogs, including two litters of puppies.

It took hours, until almost 1 a.m. Wednesday, for firefighters to bring the blaze under control. The house is about 100 years old and lacked fire stops between floors, which allowed the flames to quickly travel, Roache said at a news conference the day after the fire.

On Friday, Roache said investigators determined the fire started

in a 3-by-3-foot area on the first floor where electronics appear to have been plugged in.

Because the fire was at the bottom of the stairs, it blocked the children's exit, he said. The intense and fast-spreading fire also would have kept anyone from getting out the front door as well, Roache said.

A kitchen table blocked the back door, he said.

He said fire investigators, who included members of the Fire and Explosion Investigation Unit of the Connecticut State Police, could not determine the precise cause of the fire.

A team of insurance investigators, which includes engineers, will examine the charred wreckage and try to pinpoint what sparked the fire, Roache said.

*Parking will be available for the visitation on Thursday at the nearby Eli Whitney School, 94 Middle Road. A shuttle bus will bring people to the funeral home and back. Funeral services and burial will take place at another time, the obituary states.*