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MANVILLE FIRE KILLS THREE

Mother, two children die in blaze likely sparked by a faulty extension cord

By CELANIE POLANICK
Staff Writer

MANVILLE — A faulty extension cord may have caused a fire at a duplex that killed a mother and her two young children, and left several people homeless after the blaze gutted their homes late Monday night, authorities said.

Heather Marchie and her two older children, Tubal Eduardo Jr., 5, and Angelina Eduardo, 4, died in the fire, Somerset County Prosecutor Wayne J. Forrest said Tuesday. The blaze began at about 11:45 p.m. in the living room on the first floor of a two-story multi-family home at 210-212 S. 5th Ave., he said.

The children's father, Tubal Eduardo Sr., and their sibling, Noah Eduardo, 2, escaped with help from neighbors and were taken to Somerset Medical Center, where they were in fair condition Tuesday afternoon, hospital spokeswoman Kathleen Roberts said.

The three occupants of Unit 210; building owner George Kochis, who lives on the first floor; and second-floor tenants Marc C. Frederick and Flora Vasquez also escaped the building.

Forrest and Manville police Chief Mark A. Peltack said the order of events still is unclear. According to neighbors, two police officers were at the scene as the fire spread, and firefighters arrived as neighbors came out of their houses and rescued Tubal Eduardo Sr. and Noah.

According to Forrest's report, neighbors reported hearing screams and a crashing sound similar to a motor vehicle accident at about 11:45 p.m. Monday, and saw flames shooting from three windows on the first floor of the southeast corner of unit 212. Neighbors called 911 then rushed to the scene and removed Mr. Eduardo and Noah from the building as police and



Flames leap from a home at 210-212 S. 5th Ave. in Manville on Monday night. The blaze killed 27-year-old Heather Marchie and two of her children, Tubal Eduardo Jr., 5, and Angelina Eduardo, 4. The children's father, Tubal Eduardo Sr., managed to escape the blaze with another child, 2-year-old Noah Eduardo.

KATHY FETROMP



Angelina and Tubal Eduardo Jr. are seen in this picture provided by family friend Gerard Lardieri.



Site of fire

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Fire

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Firefighters were arriving. According to the prosecutor's report, police and firefighters then learned that Marchie and two children still were inside.

Fire Chief John Yanko ordered firefighters to put a ladder up to a second floor window to try to reach the family, said former fire chief Ken Otrinski.

"He gave them two minutes to do the best search they could," but seconds later, firefighters determined that one of the rooms was heating up and was about to explode.

"At that point, everybody just gets on their air horns to let everybody else know" to evacuate the building, Otrinski said.

Shortly after firefighters and police arrived, portions of the second floor began collapsing into the first floor and basement in unit 212, making further rescue attempts difficult, Forrest said. When the fire was out, the bodies of Marchie and her two older children were found in the debris of the first-floor living room. Investigators believe they were trapped in the bedroom directly above where the fire started, and ended up downstairs when the building collapsed, Forrest said.

Preliminary autopsies and reports from the New Jersey Regional Medical Examiner's Office in Newark indicated that the mother and her children died from smoke inhalation and thermal burns.

Eduardo, age unavailable, told investigators that Marchie, 27, and their children had gone upstairs to

What you can do

◆ Somerset County Prosecutor Wayne J. Forrest and Manville police Chief Mark A. Pellack ask anyone with information about the fire to call the Manville Police Department at (908) 725-1900, the Somerset County Prosecutor's Office Arson Task Force at (908) 231-7100 or the Somerset County Crime Stoppers Tips Line at 1-888-577-TIPS (8477); go to www.somersetcrimestoppers.org or to www.scpo.net and click on the TIPS Hotline link.

bed at 8:30 p.m., and that he had fallen asleep on a sofa bed downstairs about an hour later. He awoke later that evening to the sound of smoke detectors and saw that the room was full of smoke, which made him go upstairs to check on his family, according to Forrest's report.

Eduardo told investigators he found Noah on the steps, grabbed him and took him outside, then returned and tried to climb the stairs a second time. By this time, the stairwell was filled with thick, black smoke, the heat was unbearable and he was forced to leave the building.

Investigators believe the fire began in the first-floor living room between the sofa bed and the south wall near an electrical outlet. Firefighters found a 16-gauge, 15-foot-long extension cord running from the wall outlet along the floor to the southwest corner of the room, where it was connected to a five-outlet power strip that supplied electricity to a television, stereo and battery charger. A sec-

tion of the extension cord was missing at the base of the sofa bed, and the area around it was severely fire-damaged. Investigators believe the cord caused the fire, Forrest said.

As the fire progressed, flames attacked the floor joist to the bedroom where Marchie and her children were trapped, eventually causing the floor collapse.

Firefighters from Manville, Findernie, Somerville, Elizabeth Avenue, East Millstone and Hillsborough No. 37 fire departments responded to the blaze, along with rescue workers from the Manville, Somerville and Hillsborough rescue squads and Somerset Medical

Center Mobile Intensive Care Unit, Forrest said. When they left the scene, the house's smoke detectors still were beeping loudly.

Barry Van Horn, fire marshal for Manville, Somerville and South Bound Brook, said there were no sprinklers in the building and they weren't required to be.

"Sprinklers certainly would have made a difference here," said Van Horn, who also is a member of the Somerset County Arson Task Force.

One of the street's residents, Eric Sinibaldi, 22, was arrested for causing a disturbance at the scene and was intoxicated, police Lt. John Crater said.

Fire prevention tips

Reduce your home's risk of fire with these safety tips from the New Jersey Fire Sprinkler Advisory Board:

- Check your smoke detectors twice a year to make sure they are working and have full battery power.
- Keep a watchful eye on space heaters and make sure there is at least 3 feet of clear space around them. Do not leave heaters unattended.
- Keep flammable liquids away from heating sources, cloth or paper products. Store them in a cool location.
- Keep an up-to-date list of emergency numbers near your telephone and teach your children to use them.
- Make sure children's windows are marked clearly so firefighters can identify them.
- Develop an escape plan with your family from multiple rooms in the house, both upstairs and downstairs. Take time to review the plan and practice it together.
- Consider installing fire sprinklers. According to the advisory board, to date, there has never been multiple loss of life in a structure that had a fully installed, well-maintained fire sprinkler system.

— Celanie Polanick



Fire officials talk in front of the site of a fatal house fire on Tuesday in Manville. A 27-year-old woman and her two children were killed in the Monday night blaze.

Recent deadly fires in Central Jersey

■ **April 11, 2006:** East Franklin firefighter Kevin Apuzzo, 21, dies while he and other firefighters attempt to rescue 75-year-old Betty Scott from her burning home. The floor fell from beneath them and both Apuzzo and Scott were killed. Apuzzo was East Franklin's first firefighter to be killed in the line of duty in the 76-year history of the department.

■ **May 14, 2005:** Two children are killed in an early morning fire at Staybridge Suites in the Somerset section of Franklin. The victims are Myles Davis, 11, and Courtney

Davis, 16. Fire is blamed on a discarded cigarette that ignited a wooden staircase. The Davis family was staying in the extended stay hotel awaiting the family's transfer to North Carolina.

■ **April 29, 2005:** Branchburg resident Michael Scocca, 22, a graduate of Somerville High School and just weeks away from graduation at the University of Maryland, dies in a fire during a house party in College Park, Md. The fire is believed to have started around 4:30 a.m.

■ **July 28, 2004:** Karen MacMillan, a 49-year-old nurse,

dies in a house fire on Cedarwood Drive in Piscataway. Police call the fire a potential suicide, based upon evidence at the scene.

■ **June 2, 2004:** A Bound Brook fire at 504 W. Second St. quickly spread and killed John Geba, an elderly resident of the three-story house. The blaze started around 8 p.m.

■ **Jan. 9, 2004:** Olga Ross, in her 80s, dies in a one-story Plainfield house fire at 612 Terrill Road called in at 10:09 p.m. She lived alone in the house and used a walker. The city fire chief said the cause

of fire was an electrical problem in the bedroom.

■ **May 12, 2003:** Steve C. Balint, 74, a Manville resident and the borough's former tax collector, dies when an afternoon fire sweeps through his apartment on South Main Street. Balint used a wheelchair and walker. The apartment was a converted storefront between the Our Place Deli and J&R Home Amusements.

■ **April 23, 2001:** Three people die in an Irvington house fire blamed on an overheated extension cord used to run an air condi-

tioner. Killed in the 12:37 a.m. blaze are Gerard Montalant; a female family friend; and Montalant's baby.

■ **March 11, 2001:** Three children, their father and grandmother are killed in a Mount Olive fire at 23 Renault Drive blamed on the failure of the aluminum electrical circuit in the two-story home. Family members killed include Anna Volokoun, 69; Glen Volokoun, 45, and his three children, Jessica, 12; Danielle, 10; and Glen Jr., 8.

■ **Feb. 1, 2001:** A fire just before midnight at 10 South St.,

Manville, kills one victim found upstairs. Several first-floor people escaped. Theresa Jasinski, 66, is later indicted on a second-degree aggravated arson charge and a first-degree felony murder charge for setting the blaze that killed her brother Edward Jasinski, 75. Court documents indicate the sister was found using a walker to get to church after setting fire to items in the kitchen sink and leaving the apartment. She has a history of mental illness dating back 50 years and was said to be incoherent when police found her.

