

Sheddril22

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One adult and six children die during a three-alarm fire on Davis Street

Seven members of the same family, six of them children, died and two were injured in a three-alarm fire on Davis Street before dawn this morning after a two-story home went up in flames, said Newton's fire chief. This was the largest loss of life due to a fire in Newton's history, he said, and the incident is still under investigation.

The children and grandchildren of John Sheddril and Jeanette Sheddril, both 54 years old, moved back into the home at 37 Davis St. two weeks ago to shelter in place during the outbreak of COVID-19, said Newton Fire Chief Jay Jonas in a news conference this afternoon. A faulty kerosene heater near the stairs on the first floor was the likely cause of the fire, Jonas said.

Smoke inhalation appears to be the cause of death for the seven who died, said Jonas. A total of 14 family members were in the home when the fire broke out, and two of the seven survivors suffered serious injuries, Jonas said.

“This tragedy extends beyond [the Sheddriels] because of how much all of us care about... this family that is truly the heart and soul of our city,” said Jonas, who has been friends with the family for over 20 years.

Before the fire started, the children slept upstairs under the supervision of Alma Sheddriil, 22, and Yolanda Sheddriil, 13, daughters of John and Jeanette Sheddriil, Jonas said. The adults slept downstairs in the living room, he said.

One family member saw that the kerosene heater was “blazing [and] shooting off sparks” before the house caught fire, said Jonas, and the stairs next to the heater were already ablaze by the time smoke detectors went off.

Jeanette Sheddriil told Jonas that she was asleep when the fire broke out, he said. Once she woke up, Jonas said, she began yelling “Fire!” Both her husband and her daughter, Eva Mae Sheddriil, 25, tried but failed to climb the stairs and help those on the second floor, said Jonas.

John Sheddriil Sr. suffered from smoke inhalation, and he cut his feet while escaping through a broken window, Jonas said. Jeanette Sheddriil dragged Eva Mae Sheddriil out of the house after she tried to climb the stairs, said Jonas.

Eva Mae Sheddriil suffered burns on over 40 percent of her body, Jonas said. He added that her daughter, Jeanetta Sheddriil, 4, was among those who died.

Melinda Sheddriil, 21, Kaisha Sheddriil, 27, John Sheddriil Jr., 28, and Ulysses Watley, 49, were also able to escape, Jonas said.

All seven of the occupants upstairs, including Alma Sheddriil, Yolanda Sheddriil, and Jeanetta Sheddriil, died in the fire, Jonas said. Among the deceased were Tyshina Nero, 9 months, Sophia Jackson, 2, Jonathan Jackson, 3, and Latasha Sheddriil, 9, all of whom were under the age of 10, said Jonas.

Although investigations are ongoing, Jonas said that the positions of the bodies make it possible that Alma sought an escape near the window of a room upstairs. In another room, Yolanda did the same while the younger children are thought to have huddled in the corner, said Jonas.

Several neighbors called 9-1-1, and Melinda Sheddriil, John Sheddriil Jr., and Kaisha Sheddriil also called in, said Jonas. The first call for the fire came around 1:30 a.m. today, but they all came within about a minute of each other, Jonas said.

The three-alarm fire, which is the highest level of alarm in Newton, brought all 45 firefighters and the entire fleet of vehicles owned by Newton Fire to the scene, said Jonas.

“It was an inferno when I got there,” Jonas said. “The front of the house was a ball of fire.”

The presence of the kerosene gas is suspected to have aided the spread of the fire, he said, and the flames were intense enough to melt the rubber sleeve of one firefighter’s uniform.

The survivors were transported to Newton General Hospital where Phyllis Sheddriil, 29, was working as a nurse at the time, said Jonas. Her 9-month-old infant, Tyshina Nero, was among the deceased, he said.

Newton Fire extinguished the flames at 5:45 a.m., Jonas said. While the home “was a total loss,” firefighters were able to stop the fire from spreading to neighboring homes, said Jonas.

“I’m so proud of the men and women of my department who put the community and the families of the Sheddriils and others in the neighborhood ahead of their own safety,” Jonas said.

No funeral arrangements have been made yet, and the incident will remain under intense investigation due to the “horrendous loss of life,” said Jonas.