

New Year's fire claims youth, 19

By Dave Varga
staff writer

Funeral services will be held at 3 p.m. today for a 19-year-old Groves High graduate who died in an accidental house fire in the pre-dawn hours of New Year's Day.

The victim, Sherry Anne Mell, died of smoke inhalation when the home she was visiting at the corner of Orchard Lane and 14 Mile in Bloomfield Township burned, according to police.

Three others, homeowners Tarik and Helen Daoud and their daughter, Andrea, escaped the blaze by jumping from second-floor windows in the house. Another daughter, Jenn, 21, had left the house earlier to get something to eat.

Mell, a 1985 graduate of Groves, lived just a few houses away on Orchard Lane for about eight years until her family moved to Scottsdale, Ariz., in September. A student at Scottsdale Community College, she had been visiting the Daouds and was sleeping alone in a second-floor bedroom when the fire broke out. She was found at the foot of the stairs in the two-story structure, fire officials said.

Services will be at the Arthur Bobean Funeral Home Inc., 28307 E. Huron River Drive in Flat Rock. The Rev. Charles H. Beynon of the First Methodist Church of Birmingham will officiate.

HELEN DAUOD, 45, was listed in fair condition at William Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak suffering

from smoke inhalation. Her husband, Tarik, 50, was in good condition after fracturing his foot during the fall.

Township Fire Marshal John Brewer said Friday the fire began in the first-floor family room connecting the two sides of the house. Brewer said arson had been ruled out after his investigation, but he would not speculate about the cause of the fire.

Witnesses said Andrea, 15, was the first one out of the house. She lives next door, said the girl ran to his house and rang the doorbell but, before they could answer, she ran across the street for help.

"It was around 4:30 a.m. or so. I saw the blue lights of a police car, but the fire truck didn't come for a half an hour," Marcotty said. "It was a tremendous fire coming from a little hallway inside the house. It was literally a hundred yards in the air."

Another neighbor said of the firefighters, "It took them too damn long to get here."

FIRE DISPATCHERS reported receiving a call at 5:13 a.m. and the first fire truck from the Maple/Telegraph station arrived on the scene at 5:18 a.m., Brewer said.

"It always seems like a half hour when you're waiting for a fire truck, ambulance or police car to get there," Brewer said.

There had been a medical run with a fire truck and an emergency medical vehicle just before that, Brewer said. "But it certainly didn't interfere with our response time," he added.

Barbara Cueter, who lives down



Sherry Anne Mell dies in blaze

the block, said her son was returning home from a New Year's Eve party. "He said, 'Call the fire department. The Daouds' house is on fire.'"

Cueter said her husband ran to the house and found Tarik on the ground. "My husband tried to break out the rear windows to the patio doors, but he couldn't get in."

Several witnesses questioned why firefighters did not aim water at the house right away. "We knew right away there was a victim in there," Brewer said. "When the first two men arrived, their first concern was rescuing the victim. They went around back with a ladder and started going in with a 1 1/2 inch water line and they were driven back by the heat."

THE TWO firefighters were slung right through their gear from the heat. They were treated on the scene, Brewer said.

Tarik Daoud owns a Long Ford in Warren and Motor City Ford Truck in Livonia.

Marcotty said the Daouds built the house about 10 years ago on what had been a vacant lot. Firefighters had the blaze under control within 30-45 minutes, Brewer said, but the house was entirely gutted.

Mell, born April 16, 1967, in Detroit, is survived by her parents, James A. and Marilyn Mell, and a sister, Loylee A. of Walled Lake. Other survivors are her grandparents, Norman Comfort of Flat Rock, and Frederick and Lethan Born, also of Flat Rock.

Memorial contributions may be made to the charity of choice. Interment will be in Livonia.

Crimes took strange turns

Continued from Page 1

from scaffolding while washing windows at the K mart International Headquarters in Troy. Brian Roncesky, 19, Warren, and Jeff Williams, 19, Berkley, were killed and John Szymanski, 18, of Troy was hospitalized after falling 40 to 50 feet from the fourth and top floor of the building on Aug. 18.

The three worked for Cadillac Window Cleaning of Warren which later was fined by the state.

SCARED TO DEATH

Kathryn Griffith, a 71-year-old Troy woman who owned a popular Birmingham restaurant, died of a heart attack after being frightened when Gaye Crim Langley rammed her car into Griffith's garage and broke into the home. Troy police said that when they arrived at the scene, Langley spoke of death and warned that "Lucifer's coming." Testimony also showed that Langley had been drinking that night and may have thought she was driving to the home of her husband's lover but ended up at the home of Griffith, whom she did not know, instead.

The incident happened Dec. 8, 1985. Last fall, a jury found Langley guilty of second-degree murder.

ELEVATOR KILLING

Linda Paletta said her husband often beat her, so she was scared he would kill her when he learned that their savings account, supposedly worth millions of dollars through commodities investments, actually contained only \$150. The fear was so great, she said, that on June 2 last, an elevator of a Southfield office building where their investment coun-

selor worked, Paletta shot her husband Giuseppe, 42, six times and killed him.

Paletta said it was self-defense and Circuit Judge James Thornburg agreed. Angry Prosecuting Attorney L. Brooks Patterson, noting that bullets cost 11 cents, called the killing a "66-cent divorce."

WIFE TO TESTIFY

The alleged murder-suicide attempt by John A. Vermuelen in his Farmington Hills apartment was tragic enough at first glance. Vermuelen was seriously injured in the Dec. 20, 1985 incident and his second wife, Urine (Rene) Lewis, was killed. But the story that unfolded in 1986 contained one unusual turn after another.

Vermuelen married Lewis before his divorce from his first wife, Sharon Vermuelen, was final. Although they were separated, the divorce was not final until February of 1986.

Then, Circuit Judge Fred Mester ruled that Vermuelen's first wife, Sharon, could testify against him when he stands trial in February for the murder of Lewis. Mester's ruling noted that Sharon Vermuelen is expected to testify that her former husband informed her of his plans to kill Lewis. Lewis reportedly was leaving John Vermuelen.

Vermuelen, unable to raise bond, has been jailed while awaiting trial.

CLIENT KILLED

A Southfield attorney was charged with the murder of his client, a former Birmingham special education teacher, whose body was found inside a 55-gallon barrel dumped in Kentucky. Barbara Stephen, 43, who

lived in Southfield, was found in April, more than three months after disappearing in January. Charged with her murder was James Tural Kiles, 31, an attorney who had been appointed conservator of Stephen's finances in 1981 by Oakland County Probate Court. In February, Kiles was charged with mishandling the former mental hospital patient's finances.

TEACHERS IN TROUBLE

Two area teachers had difficult times in 1986.

Max Hase, a Rochester High School gym teacher and wrestling coach, was given a three-month jail sentence after pleading no contest to a charge of second degree criminal sexual conduct. A female student said Hase fondled her while giving her an after-school swimming lesson.

David Schultz, a Bloomfield Hills Middle School teacher and Farmington Hills resident, was charged with delivery of a controlled substance in connection with the sale of suspected cocaine. Preliminary examination testimony last month indicated that Schultz, 34, played a role in the transfer of the suspected cocaine, he was not involved in the actual sale nor was he to receive any money for the sale.

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