

2 RIT Students Killed in House Fire

A fire at an off-campus house killed two Rochester Institute of Technology students and injured a third early Friday, hours before the school inaugurated its new president.

Three other students escaped the blaze, which erupted about 2:30 a.m. in a first-floor bedroom. "Three got out with the smoke alarm - we do not know what happened with the other three yet," Deputy Fire Chief Bill Curran said.

While the cause was under investigation, fire investigators don't suspect "structural or electrical problems," Fire Capt. Dan McBride said. "What we're probably looking at is any number of human-error type of situations - unattended candles or cooking, careless smoking. We're not looking at arson or foul play or major systems problems."

The 2 1/2-story house sits in an up-and-coming area filled with pre-World War II houses and dotted with art galleries and museums. The university, which has almost 16,000 students, is located on the edge of the city in the suburb of Henrietta.

Next-door neighbor Craig DelGiorno, 19, said he was awakened by screams.

"People were coming out of the building, just collapsing," he told the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle. "Guys were jumping off the roof. In a matter of minutes, the whole house was up."

Another neighbor, Hector Perez, said he smelled smoke while watching television at his girlfriend's apartment nearby and they went out and saw the single-family house in flames.

"They was all good kids, they didn't bother nobody. I feel bad for them," Perez, 43, told the newspaper.

Killed were Seth Policzer, 21, of Parkland, Fla., who was studying computer engineering, and Syed Ali Turab, 21, a communications major from New Milford, N.J., university officials said. Both were in their fourth year of studies.

The bodies were found on the first floor and an upper floor, McBride said.

"Everybody is just very upset and distraught. It's a tragedy that shouldn't happen to any family," said Glenn Kupfer, a friend of the Policzer family who spoke on their behalf in a telephone interview with The Associated Press on Friday.

Michael DiCocco, also 21, was rescued by firefighters from a second-floor window. A fourth-year industrial design student from central New York, he was in guarded condition at a hospital but did not appear to have life-threatening injuries, university spokesman Paul Stella said.

The school offered counseling for students Friday, Stella said.

Some 3,000 students, parents and faculty observed a 10-second silence at Friday afternoon's inauguration of William Destler, who was a senior vice president for academic affairs and provost of the University of Maryland before coming to RIT in July.

"This is, frankly, every parent's nightmare," Destler said. "You send your children to college to increase the chances that they'll have a successful life, and you don't expect them to not come home again."

About the Author

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