

Six die in Vancouver, Washington, house fire

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Investigators have determined that a fire that engulfed a home in the city of Vancouver, Washington, early Easter Sunday, claiming the lives of a father and his five children, was arson. Surveillance images and the remnants of a gas can suggest that the fire was lit by the father, Tuan Dao, who was distraught over marital and financial problems.

The victims were identified as Tuan Dao and five of his six children: Nolan A. Dao, 12; Noah A. Dao, 9; Jacob A. Dao, 9; Samantha A. Dao, 8; and Nathan A. Dao, 6. Tuan Dao was 37 years old. Mr. Dao's wife, Lori Dao, and his oldest daughter were residing at another house at the time.

Tuan and Lori Dao filed for divorce after losing their personal home and another home to foreclosure. They filed for bankruptcy last September. The bankruptcy filing shows \$160,000 in credit card and other debts, including \$2,000 in gambling debt. The couple owed \$262,000 on the mortgage on the house that burned down, but the value of the house had plummeted to \$179,000.

Both Tuan and Lori Dao were employed, jointly making \$86,000 annually, but their assets were negligible. They had less than \$800 in two checking accounts and expected about an \$8,000 refund for their 2010 taxes.

Acquaintances of Tuan Dao spoke highly of him in the online comments on the *Oregonian* web site. "Tuan Dao was my friend," wrote one. "He was a very kind, gentle, and generous man. Tuan spent almost every moment of his life smiling and laughing. He worked very hard and loved his children very much. I, as well as the many others whose lives Tuan touched, are in shock and utter disbelief."

The city of Vancouver has a population of over 165,000 and is tied economically to the Portland, Oregon, metropolitan area, which encompasses more than 2.2 million people. According to the Bureau of

Labor Statistics, the area has an unemployment rate of 9.6 percent. Vancouver itself has a poverty rate of 12.2 percent.

Since the recession of 2007 began, Vancouver home prices have plummeted. According to the real estate web site Zillow.com, housing prices in the summer of 2007 were at \$239,000 before sinking to \$164,000 by the winter of 2011. More and more homes are sinking "underwater"—i.e., more is owed on the mortgage than the home is worth.

According to a RealtyTrac report, "foreclosure filings—default notices, scheduled auctions and bank repossessions—were reported on 681,153 U.S. properties in the first quarter" of 2011. While the report notes that this rate is down from last year, it points out that "foreclosure activity will begin to increase again as lenders and servicers gradually work their way through the backlog of thousands of foreclosures that have been delayed due to improperly processed paperwork."

In January, RealtyTrac reported record foreclosures for 2010. About 2.8 million properties faced foreclosure action last year, or about 1 out of every 45 households (see "2010 sets US home foreclosure record").

Dao's tragic actions are set against a backdrop of the most severe economic recession since 1929, which has seen a sharp increase in social tension due to rising unemployment, housing costs, food and tuition costs as well as home foreclosures. A recent study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that a period of rising economic distress corresponds with an increase in suicides and other desperate acts. During recessions, the suicide rate among working-age adults, from 25 to 64 years old, experiences the greatest rise.

In January 2009, Ervin Anthony Lupoe shot and killed himself, his wife, and five children, after both he and his wife lost their jobs at Kaiser Permanente in West Los Angeles. Last September in Las Vegas, Jerry

Foisel shot and killed his sister, wounded his nephew, and then killed himself. Foisel had been unemployed for several months and was unable to find a new job.

The *Las Vegas Review-Journal* commented, “Those incidents prompted police to say the economy—for the first time since the recession began in 2007—is taking its toll on citizens.”



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