

Disabled man killed in Detroit-area apartment fire

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A deadly fire erupted early Thursday morning in Hazel Park, Michigan, a working class suburb north of Detroit, killing a retired auto worker and injuring three other people living in a 56-unit apartment complex.

The blaze is one of several in the metropolitan Detroit area recently, with the majority hitting poor and working class areas.

Fire Chief Ray Dewalt of the Hazel Park Fire Department told the *World Socialist Web Site* they received a call at 6:50 a.m. that there was an apartment fire at the Woodward Heights Manor apartment complex. Dewalt said they were told flames were coming out of the front window and had engulfed one of the units.

“We did an interior attack and we located a fatality in that apartment,” stated Dewalt. “We also rescued three other people out of windows, and we have taken at least three people to the hospital and have had multiple people checked for smoke inhalation or smoke irritation.”

Later in the day the fire department determined that the fire was caused by a smoking-related accident. The blaze apparently broke out on the first floor before spreading to the upper stories.

Killed in the fire was 64-year-old Dennis Mixen, a retired auto worker who lived in the apartment with his 42-year-old son, Joseph Mixen. The son left for work at 4:45 a.m. Friends and neighbors generally looked in on Dennis, who was disabled and unable to walk after suffering two heart attacks and a stroke. He had only returned home a couple of days earlier from a short hospital stay when the fire broke out, trapping him in

his apartment.

Monique, who lives in the building, said she saw the fire and tried to warn as many people as she could to get out of the building. “I knocked on doors, shouted to people, but it was getting real bad. I just tried to get as many people out as soon as I could.”

Tanya France, who lives across the hall from Mixen, said she heard Monique and moved as fast as she could but was limited due to her own disabilities. Tanya shares the apartment with her son, Sean Stover, and her 80-year-old mother who is also disabled.

“As soon as I opened the door the smoke hit me in the face and forced me back into the apartment,” Tanya said. “My 80-year-old mother is badly disabled and has a hard time walking. My son and I had a hard time getting her out of the window, but that was the only way out. We had no other choice.”

Four apartments were destroyed in the fire and another twenty were badly damaged. Tanya’s apartment was one of the ones that was destroyed.

Tanya told the WSWS many people in the apartment complex are disabled or elderly. “I’m disabled too,” she said of her asthma. “There are several people with canes. But Mr. Mixen was unable to walk. He would fall all the time.”

Due to Mixen’s condition several people in the apartment complex looked out for him and helped him to get around. Ken Crampton, who is unemployed, said he used to help take care of Mixen. “I would check on him when his son was at work. Just to check to see if he was all right. He couldn’t really walk.”

Denise Lindsay, who helped care for Mixen, was especially broken up with the death. “I received a call

that Dad did not make it out,” stated Lindsay, who called the unrelated Mixen her dad out of affection. “Everybody in the apartment building looked out for him. Everybody tried to make sure something like this didn’t happen.”

Jeff Killian, the boyfriend of Denise Lindsay, who together helped take care of the elderly man said, “They are cutting the benefits of retired auto workers. He needed a full time caregiver but that was one of the benefits that they cut. The same thing happened to another retiree that I know. These are the people who made the auto companies what they are. I don’t think it is right that they are treated this way after working their whole lives for the auto companies.”



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