

Seven killed in Pennsylvania house fire

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A July 4 house fire resulted in the deaths of seven members of a Lancaster, Pennsylvania household. Four children under the age of nine died in the blaze that consumed a three-story duplex.

The dead are David and Crystal Kuhns, ages 51 and 41, and their children Skylar, 8; Shawn, 6; Mickey, 4; and Cordail, 2. The homeowner, Jimmie Moore, 65, also died in the fire. Moore had invited the family to share his home, neighbors say, when the Kuhns could no longer make ends meet.

David Kuhns and his sons Skylar and Shawn died in the house together with Moore. Crystal, Mickey, and Cordail died subsequently from severe burns.

Martha Moore, 22, escaped the fire by climbing out of a second story window and crossing over to a neighbouring roof. Seven months pregnant, she subsequently gave birth to 4-pound, 5-ounce daughter, Zaliah, through cesarean section Thursday morning.

Fourteen people lived in the house. Several survivors were treated for injuries and released from the hospital.

Moore's son, Jimmie Brock, 35, said his father met the Kuhns at a local veteran's club, and was assisting them through financial difficulties. The Kuhns family was reportedly days away from moving into their own home.

Jimmie Moore escaped the fire but returned to assist those still trapped inside. His body was found in a bathroom. "His instincts kicked in to go in and save people," his son said. "His thing was always to help people."

Media accounts say that the fire was started by frozen potatoes left in a heated oven, but this has yet to be officially established. Local fire chief Timothy Gregg has said that the home was without functioning fire detectors.

Brock disputes these allegations and said his family will offer more information at a Monday press conference.

Those who escaped the flames by breaking out of second floor windows, besides Martha Moore, are Shakisha Moore, Krista Conlin, Maria Colon, Travis Talton and his son, Travis Jr.

Brock said of his father, "We just had a conversation Wednesday. We were all planning to cook out for the Fourth. He was going to come over. We ended our conversation with 'I love you.'"

Lancaster, with a population of nearly 60,000, is a former industrial center. Median household income in the city is estimated at just over \$33,000, more than \$26,000 less than the Pennsylvania state average. The official unemployment rate is 8.8 percent.

The southeastern Pennsylvania city grew in the 19th century with the US iron industry. It is about one hour from Gettysburg, the town where the sesquicentennial for the famous Union victory in the Civil War was just celebrated. Lancaster was the home of leading abolitionist congressman Thaddeus Stevens.



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