

Two brothers die in Detroit house fire

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Two brothers, ages twelve and seventeen, were killed in a house fire that began Friday morning on Lyford Street on Detroit's east side. The fire station nearest to the house, a little over a mile away, was shuttered due to budget cuts two years ago.

In 2012 the city cut 25 percent of the its workforce. Over 20 fire stations were closed, amounting to fully one third of the stations in the city.

Cortez Burrell, 17, was a senior in high school. He was popular and photogenic, and was prominently featured in a front-page article on the successes of his class last month in the *Detroit Free Press*. He succumbed to injuries from burns and smoke inhalation at 12:41 a.m. on Monday. His 12-year-old brother, Quartez Burrell, died Friday morning.

Renee Lanier-Campbell, their neighbor directly across the street, told the WSWs that at around 4:45am Friday morning she saw the mother and father running in front of the house trying to get the children out of the burning building. "The mother was crying hysterically for help, said Ms. Campbell. "Please help, my babies are in the house."

Ms. Campbell said the boys' father, Cortez Sr., was desperately trying to find a ladder to get to the second floor where the boys were trapped. "I saw her husband, trying to get into the house from the front. Then he tried to get in from the back. He's a construction worker and he was searching for his ladder but it wasn't there."

Ms. Campbell's husband, Willie Campbell, said the fire started under the stairway. "If it had been anywhere else they could have gotten those kids out. But because it was right under the stairwell, they were trapped because that was the only way to go upstairs."

The Detroit Fire Department said in a statement that the cause of the fire was "electrical and by appearances accidental." DTE Energy also told the WSWs that the family had both its gas and electricity on and that there

were no unauthorized power hookups in the house.

The boys' twin sisters were away at a boarding school they attend during the week. According to reports, the family lost everything in the fire, and efforts were being made to raise money for them.

"This fire really breaks my heart," said Ms. Campbell. "Those kids, all four of them were the most intelligent kids you could find. I was so proud of them."

Willie and Renee Campbell said the father did everything he could for the children to get a good education, including taking them to school early in the morning, going back home, dropping off the car and taking the bus to work. Often he and his children would not arrive back home until after 8 p.m.

"They were the best parents in the world," said Willie, "He did this everyday without complaints," added Renee. "They may be growing up in the hood but those kids were as good and intelligent as anyone with higher incomes."

Detroit has one of the most overextended fire departments in the United States, fighting an average of 30,000 fires a year. According to the Detroit Fire Department there have been 6 fire deaths this year. Last year there were 44 fire-related deaths in the city.

Both neighbors expressed anger at the cuts to emergency services, and raised concerns that the fire department was unable to respond adequately to the fire.

Renee said she called the fire department twice before firefighters showed up. "It seemed like it took them an awful long time to get here." Renee also said the fire department had a problem with the ladder and the hookup to the hose.

The Detroit Fire Department claimed there were no problems with equipment, including the ladder and hoses, and that their response times were within national guidelines.

“They closed the station on Miller two years ago,” stated Renee, referring to the nearest fire station. “Another station was also closed nearby,” added Willie.

The city “doesn’t do anything for us anymore,” pointed to the empty homes on the block that was once populated by autoworkers making a good living. The home was only a few blocks from the shuttered Lynch Road Chrysler Complex. “Our basement backed up last year. It backed up on a lot of people, but you can’t get any help,” continued Renee.

The Campbells, who have lived in their home for over 30 years, said they believed the city government intends to use service cuts to push out residents from lower-income parts of the city. “It seems like they want to push us out, but I feel I am entitled to stay in the place where I grew up,” concluded Renee.



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