

Two workers crushed to death at Michigan granite supplier

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On Monday, September 9, two workers were killed at granite supplier Stone Warehouse in the northeastern metro Detroit suburb of Sterling Heights. The pair was attempting to move a stack of granite slabs with an overhead crane when 11 of the slabs shifted and fell. The workers were trapped between several slabs and instantly crushed to death.

Investigators released the victims' names the next day after family members identified the bodies: Benjamin Allen Welch, a 30-year-old single father from Warren, and James Jones, a 53-year-old grandfather from neighboring Shelby Township.

Each slab weighed approximately 1,000 pounds, measuring five feet wide by eight feet long. Not equipped to lift the heavy material from the victims and desperate for help, first responders to the scene had to call the Macomb County Technical Rescue Team plus three nearby businesses for assistance.

"We knew this isn't their job, but we definitely needed their help," Sterling Heights Fire Department Chief Chris Martin told local news media outlets. "One guy said, 'If that was me trapped in there, I would want someone to get me out.' No doubt about it—their help was super beneficial."

Welch's body was recovered at 6:00 pm and Jones' body was recovered at around 9:00 pm, after hours of work by the rescue team and those who assisted it. The initial 911 call was placed at 2:30 that afternoon, with reports of one potential injury from the accident. Responders realized upon arrival that there were actually two workers trapped beneath the granite.

The fire department immediately shut down the Stone Warehouse shop after the accident for multiple safety violations. "This is a public access area," the fire chief said. The accident did not occur in the back of the warehouse. "Earlier in the day there was [someone]

looking for granite. We did a search process to make sure no one was there."

The area is known as the "Ceramic Tile Mile" for the number of shops producing kitchen countertop material in its industrial park. The Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration (MIOSHA) is investigating the deaths. According to MIOSHA, there have been 23 workplace deaths in the state of Michigan in 2019.

Hundreds of people rallied in support of the grieving families following the tragedy. GoFundMe campaigns raised thousands of dollars. Members of the community organized fundraising events. Proceeds exceeding the cost of funeral expenses will go to the victims' families, including Welch's two-year-old daughter Charlotte and Jones' young grandchildren.

Friends and family of the victims set up GoFundMe campaigns to assist with funeral-related expenses. The organizer of Jones' GoFundMe page, niece Deanna Robertson, wrote: "He was very hard working and dedicated to his family. He loved his kids and grandkids more than anything. It's a very hard time for my family right now and with this happening so suddenly my family wasn't prepared for the final expenses. Anything raised will go towards memorial expenses and anything left over will be given to his immediate family (my cousin, her baby and his fiancée) for anything they may need in the future to come." The page raised over \$10,000 in two days.

Welch's GoFundMe page raised nearly \$15,000 in two days. Jessica Messenger, Welch's sister, wrote: "Thank you so much for all your generous donations. As a family we are humbled and grateful for the outpouring of support we have received from the community. We have been able to make arrangements to honor Ben the way he would want and deserved. All

additional money will go to the support of his two-year-old daughter as she navigates life without her Hero.”

One commenter on a local news page site wrote: “So sad that this workplace accident would happen. I hope something can be done to ensure the safety of everyone in dangerous work situations.” Another commenter replied, “Corporations no longer care about worker safety. To them, workers are disposable trash.”



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