

Five teenagers killed in early morning house fire in north-central Pennsylvania

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Five teenagers, ages 14 to 17, died when their home was engulfed in flames in an early Monday morning fire in Genesee Township, Pennsylvania, on the north-central border with New York.

Killed in the fire were Raymond Erway, 17; Tristan Erway, 16; Evan Erway, 14; Krysta Kane, 16; and Mikalah Roulo, 16.

The Erway boys' parents, Charlie and Michele Erway, were severely injured in the blaze. Michele suffered from smoke inhalation and injuries suffered from jumping from the home.

She was airlifted to the burn unit at Strong Memorial Hospital in Rochester. Charles, who suffered first and second degree burns over much of his body, was taken by ambulance to the hospital more than 100 miles away. The two are still hospitalized and recovering slowly.

The fire broke out in the basement between 2:30 a.m. and 3 a.m. and quickly engulfed the entire home.

Wayne Erway, Charlie's father who lived next door, said he was awoken by a loud boom. "(Charlie) usually goes to work toward the morning, and I thought at first he had started his car. But when I looked out here, it wasn't car lights I was looking at. The house was pretty well engulfed," he told the *Olean Times Herald*.

Firefighters have not yet determined the cause of the fire and say they may never be certain as the entire wood-frame house burnt down in the fire. They believe that it began in the basement from the wood-burning furnace or within the chimney. They have stated that the fire was not deliberately started.

The family has received an outpouring of support from the community. People in the community describe the children as very loving and caring and very active in community activities, particularly taking part in the 4-H youth organization.

GoFundMe page which was set up to raise \$40,000 for Charles and Michele has already hit the goal and is approaching \$50,000 in donations. One person wrote: "Your family always had a delightful vegetable stand. Wishing you the strength to face the days ahead and warm memories to hold in your heart forever."

A student who donated \$200 wrote: "Sending love and prayers to everyone impacted by this tragedy. So many hearts are broken. Automotive isn't going to be the same without you Raymond. May everyone be surrounded in love, comfort, and care to get through."

Temperatures had fallen below freezing in the days before the fire. It is not clear if the home had a gas or fuel heating system or if a wood burner was the main source of heat. Many homes in rural areas use wood-burning furnaces as either their main source of heat or to supplement a gas or fuel heating system. The high cost of home heating fuel, which has gone up over 40 percent over the past year, is driving more people to turn to wood burners.

The US Fire Administration reports that there have been 873 people killed in home fires so far this year. Pennsylvania has seen the greatest share of those, with 68 people having been killed in fires followed by New York and Texas with 62 each. In addition, 25 firefighters have been killed while fighting fires. Last year 2,265 died in home fires.

There are no requirements for local authorities to report fire deaths. The US Fire Administration, a part of FEMA, collects information from reports in the media, meaning the data is not complete.

Two very tragic fires took place earlier in the first weeks of the year, in Philadelphia and New York. On January 5, a fire ripped through a city-owned row house in Philadelphia, killing 12 people, including eight

children. Just a few days later, on January 9, an apartment fire filled the Twin Parks North West building in the Bronx borough of New York City with smoke, suffocating 17 residents to death, including nine children.

Most fires happen in the cooler months when people are using heating systems. Often the fires are the result of space heaters being used to save money or because utilities have been shut off. The vast majority of those killed in home fires are from working class or low income households in which people face overcrowding and lack some of the basic building and safety standards.



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