



News Release

OFFICE OF LOUISIANA STATE FIRE MARSHAL CODE ENFORCEMENT AND BUILDING SAFETY

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Public Safety Services

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One Dead, One Seriously Injured in Tallulah House Fire

Tallulah, LA - Early afternoon Thursday, State Fire Marshal Investigators responded to a residential structure fire in the City of Tallulah that left one resident dead and another in critical condition.

Just before 1:00 p.m. Thursday, Tallulah Police and firefighters were dispatched to a single story residential structure fire at 105 Craig Street. When officials arrived they found the homeowner, 64 year old Erma Hamilton in critical condition from loss of blood, attributed to a severe laceration to her right forearm. Hamilton told first responders that her adult son was trapped within the burning structure. After extinguishing the fire, Tallulah firefighters located the body of 24 year old Lorenzo Sanders in a central bedroom within the charred, three bedroom home. Tallulah officials requested assistance from the State Fire Marshal's Office to determine the origin, cause, and circumstances of this deadly blaze.

Sanders' body was recovered by investigators, examined and released to the Madison Parish Coroner's Office for an autopsy. Preliminary findings by investigators suggest that Sanders died as a result of smoke inhalation, but investigators will await the findings of the autopsy in order to definitively determine the cause of death.

Investigators learned that Hamilton was injured during the early stages of the fire event while attempting to rescue Sanders through a window in the bedroom where Sanders' body was later found. Hamilton had been sitting outside of the residence in a patio area when she discovered that the home was on fire. Hamilton was transported from the fire scene by ambulance to a local hospital and later airlifted to a Jackson Mississippi hospital

where she was treated for her injuries. She has since been released from the hospital and is recovering well from her injuries.

Sanders was Hamilton's legally adopted son, who was both mentally and physically challenged. Sanders suffered from partial blindness, limb paralysis, and a seizure disorder. To assist with his daily needs, Sanders also had a "full-time" caregiver, 20 year old Ieshia Candler, who is Hamilton's granddaughter. Candler was absent from the residence at the time of the fire. Preventive Measures Program's Inc. based in Tallulah confirmed to investigators that Candler is employed by their company to provide services to Sanders.

Prior to the fire, Hamilton also operated from her home, a daycare facility, through the Louisiana Family Day Care Home Food Program (FDCH) administered by the Louisiana Department of Education. As part of that program, Hamilton's residence was recently inspected by the State fire Marshal's Office for compliance with the program. District Chief Robert Baker with the State Fire Marshal's Region 4 Office told investigators, "The Hamilton residence was inspected in October of this year, with no apparent deficiencies observed by the inspector at the time of the inspection."

Investigators have since reviewed inspection documents which outline a nineteen point inspection criteria which was first attested to by Hamilton, who is the provider, and Hamilton's sponsor Delta Community Action Association, Inc. The FDCH program inspection criteria was thereafter verified through an inspection process, which in this case occurred on October 2, 2013, according to records provided. FDCH records indicate that Hamilton has operated the "in-home daycare" since 2006.

Investigators have determined that Thursday's fire originated in the central area of the residence, which includes the laundry-room. That area of the home is very near the bedroom occupied by Sanders. Investigators have yet to determine the exact cause of the fire in that area, but noted the heaviest level of damage to the residence at or near the washing machine within the laundry-room. It is unclear as to whether the home had working smoke detectors at the time of the fire.

State Fire Marshal Deputy Chief Brant Thompson said, "Items of evidence collected from the scene will be evaluated by investigators and additional testing will be done in an attempt to pinpoint the cause of this deadly fire."

The cause and circumstances associated with this fire remain under investigation.

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