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Massachusetts

South Boston apartment fire leaves two dead

By **Travis Andersen** | GLOBE STAFF MAY 28, 2012

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BILL BRETT FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

A police officer stood at the West Broadway development where a fire killed two people. No one else was injured.

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A man and a woman known for her kindness to children were found dead in a South Boston apartment Sunday after an early-morning fire, but the circumstances of their deaths remained unclear, authorities and neighbors said.

The one-alarm fire started shortly before 3 a.m. in the third-floor apartment in a brick building at 4 Linskey-Barry Court, which is part of the West Broadway housing development, officials said.

Steve MacDonald, a spokesman for the Boston Fire Department, said the blaze was contained to the one apartment and the cause is under investigation. He said it took firefighters about 15 minutes to extinguish the flames.

The department's arson unit was on the scene Sunday afternoon, along with Boston police trucks and investigators.

MacDonald and law enforcement officials would not say if the fire appeared to be suspicious, and they did not identify the victims.

MacDonald said the victims' bodies were removed from the building at about 10 a.m. and taken to the medical examiner's office. Boston police said in a statement that homicide detectives are awaiting the results of an autopsy to determine the cause and manner of the deaths.

Neighbors said the woman had lived in the building for at least a decade, and the man moved in at some point during the past couple of years.

Longtime West Broadway resident Bob Ellis, who declined to give his age, described their relationship as "a friend helping out a friend" and said the man, a veteran, would often pick up groceries for the woman.

Another man, who would give only his first name, Steve, said he was the brother-in-law of the woman and her name was Diane.

He said she was "a good-hearted person and she'd open her door to anyone."

He said homicide detectives had spoken with him, but that he knew very little about the case.

He said the male victim's first name was Richard, and he had served in Vietnam.

Other family members could not be reached for comment.

Kheila Cox, 35, lives in the development and said she often spoke with Diane, who passed out Popsicles to children during the summer months.

"She really was a sweet woman," Cox said.

Neighbors said Richard was older than Diane, but they did not know their ages.

Building residents and MacDonald said fire alarms went off when the blaze started.

A neighbor on the third floor who declined to give his name said he rapped on the victims' door when the fire broke out, but he could not rouse them.

"I felt the heat from the door," he said, adding that he later saw firefighters carrying the woman's body out of the building.

A second-floor resident who declined to give her name said a neighbor banged on her door as well.

"She said, 'Fire, fire, get out!' " the woman said.

She said she saw heavy smoke billowing from the rear of the building as she exited.

The front entrance remained sealed off with tape in the afternoon as police and fire officials investigated inside and around the property.

MacDonald said no other injuries were reported, but some of the other units had smoke and water damage. Financial damages were estimated at \$50,000, according to the fire department's official Twitter feed.

MacDonald said Boston police and Suffolk District Attorney Daniel F. Conley's office were investigating, which is standard procedure in a fatal fire.

A police spokeswoman had no information on the cause of the fire, and Conley's spokesman, Jake Wark, would not say whether it appeared to be suspicious.

"The fire investigative team . . . will review the facts and circumstances to make that determination," he said.

Globe correspondents Gal Tziperman Lotan and Matt Rocheleau contributed to this report. Travis Andersen can be reached at tandersen@globe.com.

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