



Lower Township Police Department

405 Breakwater Road
Erma, NJ 08204
609-886-1619

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

LOWER TOWNSHIP POLICE IDENTIFY VICTIM OF HOUSE FIRE TWO OFFICERS HOSPITALIZED AFTER RESCUE ATTEMPT

On Wednesday, January 27th, Lower Township Police Chief, Edward Donohue, identified the victim of a house fire in Lower Township which occurred on Tuesday, as Mr. Joseph Sims, age 85, of 434 Breakwater Road in the Erma Section of Lower Township.

Chief Donohue stated that the Police Communication Center received a 9-1-1 call from the victim's wife, Mrs. Marie Sims at approximately 3:40 pm, Tuesday afternoon, indicating that her house was on fire and that her husband was still inside the residence.

The Erma Fire Department was immediately dispatched to the fire location while Lower Township Patrol Officers, William Barcas and Michael Szemcsak responded to the fire arriving within two (2) minutes of the 9-1-1 call.

The officers observed Mrs. Sims standing outside her front door with heavy smoke coming from the front of the residence. The officers reported later, that Mrs. Sims appeared to be in shock. The officers moved Mrs. Sims away from the residence then attempted to enter the front door, but were driven back by flames and heavy smoke.

Officers Barcas and Szemcsak then ran to the back door which was locked. The officers forced entry to the residence by kicking the door open.

Staying low, officers were able to crawl into the kitchen area of the residence despite the intense heat and heavy smoke.

The officers could not locate Mr. Sims and were about to back out of the residence when they observed movement on the ground.

The movement turned out to be the family's pet dog which was still in it's kennel. Patrolman Barcas was able to grab the kennel just as the flames had reached it.

Patrolman Szemcsak was able to grab Patrolman Barcas by the legs and pulled Barcas and the dog out of the residence, at that point there was an overflash of the fire blowing out the front windows of the residence.

Both of the officers and Mrs. Sims suffered from smoke inhalation. They were treated on scene by Lower Township Rescue Squad, then transported by the Lower Township Rescue Squad to Cape Regional Medical Center for further treatment.

Prepared by: Dt. Lt. Keywood

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A group of Firefighters from the Erma Fire Department, which is located within one (1) block from the residence, were at the fire house at the time of the call and were able to respond to the fire within minutes. Firefighters then made an aggressive entry into the building and attack on the fire and were able to quickly knock down the fire. Firefighters then located the victim and determined that he was deceased.

Erma Firefighters were assisted by Townbank, Villas, Rio Grande and Cape May Fire Firefighters as well.

Chief Donohue praised the efforts of his Police Officers, along with Firefighters and Rescue Personnel during the rescue attempt adding, "Certainly our thoughts go out to all the family members who have been impacted by this tragedy."

The cause of the fire is currently under investigation by the Lower Township Police Department including Arson Investigator, Detective Joseph Boyle, The Cape May County Prosecutor's Office and The Cape May County Fire Marshall's Office.

However the fire does not appear to be suspicious in nature at this time.

Press Release Prepared By:

Detective Lieutenant Thomas Keywood