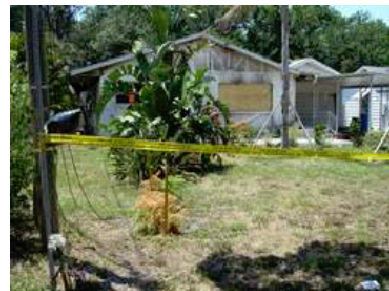


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Neighborhood's second fatal fire has residents grieving

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MANATEE — Fire took a second life Tuesday morning on a quiet Bradenton street where neighbors were still reeling from the loss of another neighbor in a blaze in February.



Neighbors of William Loran Yoakum II, 43, said they tried everything they could to get him out of his house before firefighters arrived. West Manatee Fire Rescue Capt. Tom Sousa said at 2:30 a.m., firefighters found the roof of Yoakum's house at 812 36th St. W. engulfed in flames.

Inside they found Yoakum dead on the kitchen floor three feet from his back door. Fire officials said he most likely died from smoke inhalation. Yoakum, who neighbors said was disabled and used a walker, lived alone in the house, according to Manatee County Sheriff's Office reports.

Jessica Runck said she called 911 after her mother first spotted the fire across the street and woke her up.

"She was screaming, 'Fire, there's a fire.' I called 911 and my mother and husband ran to try to help," said Runck.

Rendy Zola and Clint Runck tried to make contact with Yoakum. Runck sprayed flames spewing out of Yoakum's shattered windows with a hose he found in the front yard, while Zola grabbed one of Yoakum's walkers on the front porch and used it to bang on the door.

"We were shouting at top of our lungs, 'Loran! Loran!' He went by his middle name," said Zola.

As the flames overtook the home's roof and firefighters arrived, Runck and Zola were told to move back from the blaze.

"I just wish we could have gotten him out," said Zola. "It is just terrible."

Firefighters later found Yoakum dead in the home as they battled the blaze, Sousa said.

Sousa said 26 firefighters from West Manatee and the Bradenton Fire Department battled the fire, which is being investigated by state and West Manatee fire marshals, and the sheriff's office.

The cause of the fire remains under investigation, but there is nothing suspicious about the blaze in preliminary findings, Sousa said.

Yoakum is the second person killed in a house fire on 36th Street West in the past three months. In February, a fire destroyed a home in the 600 block of 36th Street West, two blocks from Yoakum's home. The blaze firefighters said was caused by a space heater killed 54-year-old Virginia Butera.

Jessica Runck said Butera's death shocked the neighborhood and deeply affected her 6-year-old son, who goes to school with Butera's grandson.

"It is just really sad," said Jessica Runck. "My son has been saying things like our house might catch on fire after hearing things at school. Then this happens across the street. It is really traumatizing for him. I just feel for these people and their families."

West Manatee Deputy Fire Marshal Kurt Lathrop said in the wake of two fatal fires on the same street, the department will canvass the neighborhood to do free inspections of home smoke detectors. If a residence doesn't have smoke detectors, the department will be handing them out for free, Lathrop said.

Lathrop said it is still under investigation whether Yoakum had working smoke detectors in his home, but two fatalities on the same street has firefighters looking to spread awareness.

"We really want to get the word out how important smoke detectors are.

They save lives," said Lathrop.

Runck and Zola said Yoakum was a mild-mannered man who mostly kept to himself.

They would exchange waves and hellos, and would hear him calling his dog, "Malcolm." The dog survived the fire and has been taken into custody by Manatee County Animal Services.

The loss of a neighbor made for a tough morning for Zola and the Runck family.

"It is going to be weird not seeing him sitting on his front porch," Runck said of Yoakum.

