

Two Buffalo firefighters die as floor collapses at East Side deli fire

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Two Buffalo firefighters were killed in an early morning fire at a deli on Genesee Street on the city's East Side.

The deaths were confirmed at about 9:50 a.m. by the Rev. Derren L. Young, Erie County Medical Center chaplain. The bodies were taken out of the building on gurneys draped with American flags.

1. Reports from the scene indicated the two firefighters may have fallen through the first floor while searching for a civilian victim. Earlier reports that a third victim was trapped inside were not confirmed.

Firefighters responded to a 3:49 a.m. alarm at 1815 Genesee St., one block west of Bailey Avenue. A sign on the building indicated it housed Super Speedy Deli.

Black smoke was still pouring out the top of the brick building after 8 a.m. today, more than four hours after the fire was reported. At about 8:45 a.m., flames rekindled on the second floor of the burned-out brick building, bringing a second ladder, from Truck 14, to join the firefighters from Truck 6, who were already pouring water on the fire.

Grief was etched on the faces of more than a dozen off-duty firefighters who stood near the still-burning building, most dressed in shorts and blue Buffalo Fire Department t-shirts or sweatshirts.

It's very difficult when anybody loses a loved one, and especially so when they serve our community as police or firefighters, Rev. Young told reporters.

"They're ministers to our community," he said. "To lose them, I can't explain.... We need much praying for all the families and everyone involved. But for the grace of God, it could have been any of them."

The building is almost directly across the street from Wende Street, where Buffalo Firefighter Mark P. Reed lost his right leg battling an arson fire in June 2007. Reed also suffered a skull fracture, seven broken ribs, a punctured lung and a brain bleed when a brick chimney toppled on his head and body.

After dawn, a legion of top city officials converged on the scene, including Brown, Police Commissioner H. McCarthy Gipson and Deputy Commissioner Daniel Derenda. It was an agonizing wait for friends and coworkers of the fallen firefighters. Many of them stood near the burned-out building, arms folded, heads down, waiting for word.

Fire Division Chief Donald McFeeley said he's been on the force for 36 years.

"We've gone through this many times and you never get used to it," McFeeley told reporters.

"But you have a job to do."

A group of civilians believed to be family members were being comforted at mid-morning by fire and police officials as they gathered near the scene.

Shortly before 9:30 a.m., those families were ushered closer to the fire scene at the same time

that firefighters donned their helmets and began entering the building.

About 10 minutes later, firefighters, off-duty firefighters and civilians standing inside the police cordon took off their helmets or hats in respect to the fallen firefighters.

"They're traumatized by the whole event, as we all would be," Young said of the families. "We just lift them up and tell them God still loves them."

Names of the firefighters were not released.

"This underscores how difficult and dangerous the work is that our firefighters do," the mayor said at the scene. "Every day they go to work, they're heroes."

Officials had no comment this morning on the cause of the fire.