Fathers, Firefighters: Lives Lost in West, Texas

Associated Press

WEST, Texas (AP) — On April 17, an explosion at a fertilizer plant in West, Texas, leveled part of the small town located some 20 miles north of Waco. Most of the victims were first responders from fire departments in West and other nearby towns that were on the scene trying to control the fire that preceded the blast.

This undated photo provided by Marshall and Marshall Funeral Directors, shows Jerry Dane Chapman. Chapman was killed in the West, Texas fertilizer plant explosion. **(AP Photo/Marshall and Marshall Funeral Directors)**

This 2012 photo provided by the Uptmor family shows Buck Uptmor. Uptmor was killed in the West, Texas fertilizer plant explosion. **(AP Photo/Uptmor Family)**

This undated photo provided by Aderhold Funeral Home, Inc., show Robert Snokhous. Snokhous was killed in the West, Texas fertilizer plant explosion. **(AP Photo/Aderhold Funeral Home, Inc.)**

This undated photo provided by Aderhold Funeral Home, Inc., show Douglas James Snokhous. Snokhous was killed in the West, Texas fertilizer plant explosion. **(AP Photo/Aderhold Funeral Home, Inc.)**

This undated photo provided by Aderhold Funeral Home, Inc., show Joseph F. Pustejovsky Jr. Pustejovsky was killed in the West, Texas fertilizer plant explosion. **(AP Photo/Aderhold Funeral Home, Inc.)**

This undated photo provided by Marshall and Marshall Funeral Directors, shows Cyrus Adam Reed. Reed was killed in the West, Texas fertilizer plant explosion. **(AP Photo/Marshall and Marshall Funeral Directors)**

This undated photo provided by Aderhold Funeral Home, Inc., show Perry Wayne Calvin. Calvin was killed in the West, Texas fertilizer plant explosion. **(AP Photo/Aderhold Funeral Home, Inc.)**

This undated photo provided by Aderhold Funeral Home, Inc., show Kenneth "Luckey" Harris Jr. Harris was killed in the West, Texas fertilizer plant explosion. **(AP Photo/Aderhold Funeral Home, Inc.)**

With help from relatives, friends and obituaries of the deceased released by local funeral homes, The Associated Press compiled vignettes of some of the 14 victims who died in the blast. They were a grandmother, a town secretary, a fire truck builder, a town festival organizer, fishing enthusiasts, hunters, fathers, men preparing to become emergency medical technicians, and devoted church and local organization members.

Here are their stories:

WILLIAM "BUCK" UPTMOR: Fence-builder, musician, rodeo devotee

Uptmor, 45, owned a fence-building business and was supposed to start a job at a nearby ranch soon. Among other projects, Uptmor's company built the local cemetery's fence, said Bill McKown, a retired school superintendent from Abbott, Texas, a town six miles from West.

"He was always busy," building fences, McKown said. "Because he was very reliable."

Uptmor was the drummer for the band Billy Uptmor and the Makers. He enjoyed hunting, fishing, watching his children's sporting events, coaching Little League and supporting his daughter in barrel racing. He trained and jockeyed race horses and loved to rodeo, whether it was riding bulls or saddle and bareback broncos,

according to an obituary released by a funeral home in West.

"I told him: 'You probably got every bone in your body broken.' And he said, 'That's probably true,'" McKown said.

He is survived by his wife of 13 years, Arcy Uptmor, his parents, two sons, a daughter, a grandmother, a brother, a sister and several nieces and nephews.

JOEY PUSTEJOVSKY: A caring, devout man

Joey Pustejovsky, 29, one of the volunteer firefighters killed in the blast, was the secretary for the town of West, said Veronica Felderhoff, a volunteer at the church where Pustejovsky's mother, Carolyn, works as a secretary to the rectory.

"He was a very caring person, always ready to help, a very devout Catholic," Felderhoff said. The Pustejovskys attended Mass every Sunday.

A funeral home obituary said Pustejovsky had been town secretary since 2009 and had worked as a personal property appraiser for McLennan County Appraisal District. He was a member of St. Mary's Catholic Church of The Assumption, where he started the youth ministry and was the director for two years of the Catholic Brothers and Sisters United Youth Ministry, the obituary said.

He loved spending time with his children and family as well as being involved in the community and his church.

The youngest of three brothers, Pustejovsky is survived by his wife, four children, his parents, a brother, grandmother and other relatives.

PERRY CALVIN: Father, husband, firefighter

Perry Calvin, 37, died responding to the fire at the fertilizer plant. His father, Phil Calvin, said Perry, a husband and father of two boys ages 9 and 2, was looking forward to his wife having a new baby around Thanksgiving.

He was a volunteer firefighter at the Navarro Mills and Martens fire departments and was attending EMS classes in West. He also was a student at the Hill County Fire College.

He was a self-employed farmer and loved the outdoors. He enjoyed horseback riding, rodeos, fishing and spending time with his family, a funeral home obituary said.

He is survived by his wife, Rebecca Ann Calvin, two sons, his father, a brother, two sisters, grandmother, nieces, nephews and other relatives.

JIMMY MATUS: Fire truck-builder and operator

Matus, 52, was killed while responding to the fire that caused the explosion. He was

the sales manager at Westex Welding & Fire Apparatus, a company that builds fire trucks. For the past 40 years, he worked at the company and for the last half of that time he managed all aspects of the business, a funeral home obituary said.

"Jimmy was an outstanding man, someone who would go out of his way to help you. That's the way we are taught," said Garratt Matus of his father's cousin, Jimmy Matus.

Matus graduated from West High School in 1979.

He was a member of St. Mary's Catholic Church of the Assumption, SPJST Lodge 54, Sokol West and the State Fireman's Association, and an honorary member of the Masonic Lodge in West. He also served on the West ISD school board and played Santa Claus for local organizations, the obituary said.

He is survived by his parents, his son and daughter, two stepdaughters, two sisters, grandchildren, nieces and other relatives.

KENNETH HARRIS: Dallas firefighter

Dallas Fire-Rescue Capt. Kenneth Harris, 52, was off duty when the fire that caused the West Fertilizer explosion happened, but he still rushed to the emergency to offer his help to other firefighters responding to the scene.

"Captain Harris' response is typical of all our first responders; night and day, no matter where they are, no matter if they are on or off duty they respond with the greatest acts of bravery," Dallas City Manager Mary K. Suhm said in a statement.

Dallas Fire Chief Louie Bright III said, "Our hearts are heavy and hurting with the loss of such a great firefighter, great husband and great family man."

Harris graduated from the Dallas Fire Academy in 1982 and served as a firefighter with the Dallas Fire Department for more than 31 years. He also owned Harris Home Inspections and Construction with his family, a funeral home obituary said.

He loved offshore fishing with his sons and spending time on his boat the "Boots Up." He was a member of High Point Church in Waco and the Dallas Firefighters Association-Local 58.

He is survived by his wife of 28 years, Holly Harris of West; three sons; parents; two sisters; nieces and a nephew.

DOUGLAS SNOKHOUS: Firefighter, father, hunter

Douglas J. "Doug" Snokhous, 50, had been a firefighter with the West Fire Department for more than 15 years. He and his brother, Robert, were among the first responders killed in the blast.

"We are comforted they were together at the end," the Snokhous family said in a

statement.

Snokhous was a shop supervisor at the Central Texas Iron Works in Waco, where he had worked for the past 29 years, according to a funeral home obituary.

A native of Hillsboro, Snokhous graduated from West High School in 1980.

He loved Westfest and the West Rodeo. He liked to fish and hunt deer and quail. He especially cherished spending time with his new grandson.

He and his brother, Robert, were inseparable. They worked, hunted, golfed and fought fires together.

Doug Snokhous is survived by his wife of 12 years, Donna Snokhous; two daughters; three stepchildren; a brother; a sister; his grandson; three stepgrandchildren; and several great nieces and nephews.

ROBERT SNOKHOUS: Firefighter, father

Capt. Robert Snokhous, 48, died with his brother doing one of the things the two of them loved: responding to an emergency in their community.

Born in 1964 in Hillsboro, Robert Snokhous graduated from West High School in 1982 and received an associated degree from Texas State Technical College in Waco. He worked at Central Texas Iron Works in Waco, where he was project manager. He had worked there for almost 20 years, the Snokhous family said in a statement.

He was a member of St. Mary's Catholic Church of the Assumption and the Knights of Columbus West Council No. 2305. He loved hunting and the West Volunteer Fire Department outdoor cook-offs.

He is survived by his wife of 13 years, Alison Snokhous; a son; two daughters; a brother; a sister; two grandchildren; several nieces and nephews; and other relatives.

CODY DRAGOO: Firefighter, NASCAR fan, family man

Cody Frank Dragoo, 50, a member of the West Volunteer Fire Department, also worked at the fertilizer plant. He was one of the first responders killed in the explosion.

Dragoo was born in Billings, Mont., and graduated from Montana State University with a degree in agriculture, a funeral home obituary said.

He enjoyed hunting, fishing, cooking, watching NASCAR and being with his family and friends, the obituary said.

Dragoo was a member of St. Mary's Catholic Church of the Assumption in West and

the Knights of Columbus Council No. 2305. He was president of the Cottonwood Water Supply Corp.

He is survived by his wife, Patty Dragoo, two sisters, brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law as well as several nieces and other relatives.

JUDITH ANN MONROE: Grandmother, puzzle solver

Judith Ann Monroe, a native of Sinton, Texas, moved to West in 2001 from South Texas where she had lived most of her life. Called "Judy" by those who knew her, she enjoyed spending time with her family, especially her grandchildren, a funeral home obituary said.

Monroe, 65, loved reading, solving word puzzles and playing board games.

She is survived by her son, two grandchildren, a sister and other relatives.

MARIANO SALDIVAR: Loving husband and father

Mariano Saldivar, 57, lived in an apartment complex that was destroyed by the blast.

The Rev. Ed Karasek, pastor of the St. Mary's Catholic Church of the Assumption, said Saldivar would attend Mass every Sunday with his wife and daughter. "He was a faithful and loving husband and father," Karasek said during a eulogy at Saldivar's funeral service.

"He trusted in God whenever any one (of his relatives) was away on a trip or was ill, at times of hardship or sadness, during the drought or at times of war, when he lost loved ones," Karasek said of Saldivar.

A native of Mexico, Saldivar moved to California where he worked in the warehousing industry until he retired in 2008, according to a funeral home obituary.

Saldivar is survived by his wife, three sons, a daughter, three brothers and nine sisters. He will be buried in Portland, Ore.

JERRY DANE CHAPMAN: Firefighter, video gamer, generous man

Jerry Dane Chapman, 26, was known for his passion for helping others, both those he knew and those he did not.

Chapman, one of the first responders killed in the blast at the fertilizer plant, died doing what he loved to do: serving and protecting others, a funeral home obituary said.

Chapman was an avid video gamer. After working at different types of jobs, he discovered his passion when he became a member of the Abbott Volunteer Firefighters and started training to become an emergency medical technician. He

had passed his skills test and was near the end of his training.

He is survived by his parents, grandparents, a great-grandmother, a sister and other relatives.

CYRUS ADAM REED: First responder almost done with EMT training

Cyrus Adam Reed, 29, was in a classroom attending the last session of his training to be an emergency medical technician when he responded to his final emergency call, a funeral home obituary said.

Reed, one of the first responders killed in the explosion at the West Fertilizer plant, was a member of the Abbot and Bynum volunteer fire departments and West Ambulance.

The obituary described him as having an "infectious smile," ''a giant heart" and "a dedication to honor of which he would not compromise."

He is survived by his grandmother, parents, a sister and several other relatives.

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