

FOUR IN FIRE, TWO MORE IN SEPARATE TRAFFIC ACCIDENTS

Long weekend claims six area residents

By GREG ROTHWELL
of The Sentinel-Review

EMBRO — A funeral service is to be held Wednesday for John and Joy Breukers and their two young children. They perished after a fire broke out in their Embro home late Sunday night.

A cooking pot left on a stove has been cited as the cause of the fire which engulfed the kitchen of the stone veneer house on Commissioners Street West and filled the building with smoke.

Breukers, 31, his 29-year-old wife and their children Kenneth, 7, and Karla, 5, were overcome by, and died from, carbon monoxide caused by the smoke which built up after the fire caught onto kitchen panelling and cupboards and spread to the ceiling.

TWO OTHERS

In addition to the four fire deaths, two other Oxford County residents, one from Thamesford the other from Bright, died in separate traffic accidents during the Victoria Day

weekend.

Fire officials investigating the Embro deaths found no smoke detector in the Breukers' home. Bill Exley, an investigator with the Ontario Fire Marshal's office, said the family may have been saved if there had been such an alarm in the home. The family may have been asleep when the pot caught fire, the four bodies were found in various parts of the building.

SPOTTED SMOKE

Coroner Dr. James Town said Monday there will not be an inquest into the deaths.

The smoke and fire was spotted by a neighbor, who contacted the Embro fire department; neighbors made an unsuccessful bid to rescue the Breukers family.

Embro fire chief Don Shewan said the department had the fire under control fairly quickly, but the family had already succumbed to the noxious smoke.

Shewan said the fire was the worst in the recent history of the village of 800. A number of years ago a young boy died in a trailer fire, Shewan said.

A fireworks display organized by the Embro-West Zorra Optimists Club, that was to have been held at Matheson Park, was cancelled due to the deaths.

Club president Earl Brenneman said

Monday "This is certainly a sad day."

The Breukers had lived in Embro for about eight years.

Breukers was an auto-body apprentice at Macnab Auto Sales Ltd. in Ingersoll, he had worked there since last summer. Prior to that he had been a stone mason. His wife worked at the London branch of the Continental Bank of Canada. Kenneth was a student at Zorra Highland Public School, Karla was to start kindergarten classes there this fall.

Tim Bannon, the operator of Macnab's, said Monday Breukers "was an excellent worker." News of the deaths came "as quite a shock," he said.

A HARD WORKER

Breukers "showed tremendous enthusiasm," Bannon said. "He proved to be a hard worker."

"There were so many things he could do," Bannon said, "he was very handy."

His death "will be a tremendous loss to us," said Bannon.

Terry Whetstone, who lives in the house next door to the Breukers, said they "were very good neighbors."

Another neighbor, T.F. Barnett, said the Breukers "were a nice young couple."

"This is tragic," Barnett said. "You

usually hear of this happening in other places."

A Thamesford man died and an Embro man remains in serious condition in hospital following a two-car collision west of Woodstock Monday night.

Dead is Gary Freemantle, 33, of Thamesford.

The Woodstock OPP reported this morning that Freemantle, who was alone in his car, died in the crash which happened about 10:45 p.m. on Highway 2, near the Canada Cement Lafarge plant. Freemantle was pronounced dead at the scene.

Donald Brenneman, of Embro, the driver of the second car, was listed in serious condition in the intensive care unit of Woodstock General hospital today. His wife Hughena, who was a passenger in his vehicle, was treated at the Woodstock hospital and released.

And a Bright man died in a motorcycle accident near Grand Bend during the weekend.

Tony Hohl, 20, of 11 John St., Bright was riding on Highway 81, just south of Grand Bend, about 8:30 a.m. Monday when he failed to negotiate a curve and his motorcycle left the road, entered a ditch and struck a tree, killing him outright, the Exeter OPP reports.



PHOTO OF the house in Embro where a family of four died Sunday night, a police seal now over the front door.

(Staff photo by Greg Rothwell)