



The pavement was strewn with rubble and coated with diesel fuel as the twisted remains of the eastbound tractor trailer came to rest on the edge of the highway. Emergency personnel worked for hours to free all the injured passengers in the bus and transport them to area hospitals in ambulance buses.

TED BROWN Independent/Free Press

Local seniors among victims

By LISA TALLYN
Staff writer

Three Georgetown women were among the five people who lost their lives Wednesday morning in a horrific bus/truck crash on Hwy. 7 at Silvercreek.

Longtime friends Hilda Hilts, 76, and Margaret (Maggie) Martin, 78, were both killed in the crash. Maura Mercer, a Georgetown resident for the past 30 years, also died in the crash. All three women will be sadly missed by their family and friends.

Margaret's son Danny, of Georgetown, said his mother moved to Georgetown when she was 13 years old from Cornwall, England. She met her husband, the late Robert Martin, at the Stewarttown Community Centre.

Margaret worked in the factory at Smith and Stone until she was 65 years old.



HILDA HILTS

"She had a lifelong involvement in St. George's Anglican Church," said Danny.

He added she used to be very active in the Royal Canadian Legion women's auxiliary and was an avid bowler.

"She was very active and in excellent health," said Danny.

He added his mother was considering going to see the Reverend Billy Graham crusade at the Skydome the night before the bus trip and almost canceled, but decided to accompany her close friend Hilda.

Hilda Hilts was born in Glen Williams in 1918. In 1946 she married Art Hilts from Norval. The couple would have celebrated their 50th anniversary in February.

Art said the couple moved to Georgetown after they were married and she worked part-time as a weaver in Glen Williams. She later worked at Superior Grocery part-time as a cashier.

The Hilts have three daughters, Louise, Mary and Susan.

Hilda was a member of both the Golden Circle Seniors Club and Belles and Beaus and had been on many seniors trips in the past.

"She was a very private person," said her daughter Mary Robinson. "She loved her family and was very proud of her grandchildren."



MARGARET MARTIN



MAURA MERCER

Bus tour ends in tragedy

By JANET BAINE
Staff writer

It was a bus excursion that went tragically wrong, leaving five dead and several injured.

A Denny's bus, driven by Fred Pritchard of Guelph, started out early Wednesday morning, picked up three passengers in Milton, then another 13 Georgetown seniors, said Staff Sgt. Al Smouter of Milton OPP.

Along with tour guide Jill Hubbert, 49, the group was on its way to Erin at about 8:30 a.m. to pick up more seniors before heading to the Muskoka area for a boat cruise.

At the bottom of Silvercreek hill on Hwy. 7, a red dump truck, driven by 20-year-old Scott Auger of Milton, was pulling right onto private property and had nearly completed its turn when the collision happened, Smouter said. The 43-seat coach bus, which was just behind the dump truck, veered toward the eastbound lane of the highway to avoid a collision, but instead crashed head-on with a tractor trailer loaded with sand, Smouter said.

Tractor trailer driver Reginald Gobert, 54, of Chesley was killed; his truck cab, an unrecognizable mass of metal and his load of sand thrown onto its side.

The bus bounced backwards and struck a car which was following behind, however, its two occupants, sisters Jamie Picard, 19, and Kelly Picard, 23, of Kilbride were not injured.

All of the injured people, with the exception of Hubbert were taken to Georgetown Hospital. The last of those well enough to go home left the hospital at around 2:15 p.m. Wednesday. Five remained in Georgetown Hospital. As of press time only two were still hospitalized.

Crews worked to clean up after the accident and opened one lane of traffic at 10 p.m. while the OPP continued their investigation.

Smouter told this newspaper the accident was a result of the bus being too close to the red dump truck, and being forced to veer left to avoid it.

"No charges will be laid," he added.

Pritchard, the bus driver, had worked for Denny's Bus Lines for nearly three years. He has two children, a son and a

daughter who are around 11 and 14 years old, according to a Denny's spokesperson who did not wish to be identified.

Employees at the Denny's Bus Lines, well known for its bus excursions, were stunned by the tragedy.

"We're very concerned about the family members and anybody that is injured. We're shaken from the whole thing," the spokesperson said.

Owner Clarence Denny was so shaken by the incident that he was unable to talk as he toured the site after the accident.

Denny's employee, Jill Hubbert, who was airlifted to Sunnybrook Hospital, was taken out of intensive care and upgraded to good condition Thursday. She had only been working at Denny's for a couple months and the company spokesperson could not provide any personal information, only that she lives in Guelph.

The driver of the tractor trailer, Reginald Gobert, 54, of Chesley, was the father of three grown children. He had just purchased his truck, said John McDougall, employee of Louis McNichol Trucking Ltd., the company which Gobert had just recently started driving for.

Condition updates

Deceased:

- Bus driver, Frederick Pritchard, 44, of Guelph.
- Tractor trailer driver, Reginald H. Gobert, 54, of Chesley.
- Hilda Hilts, 76, of Georgetown.
- Margaret Martin, 78, of Georgetown.
- Maura Mercer, 66, of Georgetown.

In hospital (as of Thursday evening):

- Jill Hubbert, 49, of Guelph, in good condition at Sunnybrook Hospital.
- Daisy Jones, of Durham St. in stable condition at Georgetown Hospital.
- Marian Richardson, of Durham St. in stable condition at Georgetown Hospital.

Treated and released from Georgetown Hospital:

- Ernest Pearce, Duncan Dr.
- Eileen Bailey, Milton.
- Raymond and Edna Aldwell, Durham St.
- Earl Merrill, Raylawn Cres.
- Margaret Hodgins, Durham St.
- Fern Boisvenue, Byron St.
- Sally Coleman, Durham St.
- Robert and Pearl West of Milton.



Physically and emotionally drained Halton Hills firefighters trudged wearily from the crash scene after rescuing the injured passengers from the bus in extremely hot, humid conditions. Hundreds of emergency personnel converged on the area to help free people from the wreckage and transport them to hospital. See pages 12 and 13.

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