

THE REGION: Fire Marshal still investigating cause of house explosion

Father of two dies in blast

Neighbours in shock over tragedy in Keswick subdivision

BY RICK VANDERLINDE
STAFF WRITER

A single bouquet of flowers was propped up against the tangled pile of debris Friday, a few yards from where Terry Shaw died when his house was flattened in a suspected gas blast.

Shaw, 39, a married father of two, had just returned home to Keswick from working a nightshift in Brampton when the explosion flattened his Newlands Avenue home shortly after 8 a.m.

Police discovered Shaw's body next to the gas furnace in the basement about five hours after the

house exploded. Shaw's wife Nancy and his two daughters, Amanda, 9, and Samantha, 5, had just left their two-storey home when the blast rattled the foundations of houses throughout the subdivision.

Amanda was at nearby R.L. Graham Public School, where classes begin at 8:05 a.m., and Samantha had just been dropped off at the sitter's house by her mother.

Murray Bowers, a long-time family friend, described Terry Shaw as a friendly neighbour who was a "regular guy."

"He was a handyman who liked to help anyone who needed it," Bowers said. "He helped build the fence in my backyard. He was a good guy who would stop to lend a helping hand to anyone who asked."

As of Friday, the Fire Marshal's office had yet to determine the cause of the explosion, which also destroyed the homes on either side of the Shaw house. Fire Marshal Eric Blough had been awaiting the results of an autopsy yesterday to help him determine why the house exploded.

The blast was witnessed by several residents, including one of the Shaws' next-door neighbours, who was waiting for his bus to Sutton District High School.

At first, 16-year-old Rob Bedard feared the worst because his mother, Louise, and his three-month old baby brother, Cyris, were home at the time.

"I heard this big bang, then someone said, 'That's your house on fire,'" a still shaken Bedard said. "I ran to the house and my mom came running out with the baby in her arms."

Bedard said his mother escaped uninjured, even though she was hit in the back by flying debris.

Bedard said he ran into the house to retrieve personal items only to discover the second floor bedrooms "were gone."

Bedard's stepfather, Richard Hobbs, said his wife probably would have been killed if the blast occurred one day earlier because



PHOTO/CELIA BRONKHORST

Firefighters search the wreckage of a Keswick home early Thursday after an explosion killed resident Terry Shaw, 39. The blast destroyed the home and caused severe damage to many others.

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she was still in bed at the time.

Neighbours said the Shaws have lived in the house for about eight years, ever since the subdivision, located near the Queensway and Biscayne Boulevard, was constructed.

Next-door neighbour Joanne Stark was at home in her bungalow when she was knocked down a flight of stairs by the thundering shock wave.

Stark, who hurt her ankle,

limped down her street Friday morning to survey the damage to her home, which will have to be demolished. Stark and her husband Dave were still too rattled by the experience to talk about it.

Georgina Mayor Rob Grossi said municipal engineers have to decide how many homes will be condemned due to structural damage.

Grossi, who was on the scene less than an hour after the explosion, said the fact the homes' basements were linked may have caused more damage.

Building inspectors, insurance agents and engineers were combing over houses on the street Friday. An estimated 30 homes were damaged.

Claudia Colell, who lives directly across the street from the Shaws, said cracks have been discovered in the foundation of her home.

Colell said she and her three-

year-old son, Casey, witnessed the explosion as they were looking out their front window. "I could feel the impact inside my house, it was so tremendous."

Colell said her son awoke Thursday night with nightmares, still terrified of the devastation he had witnessed.

"It was horrible," she said. "Within seconds, everyone was out on the street hugging each other and crying."

York Regional Police Const. Marie Ahrens was a block away when her cruiser was rocked by the explosion. "Seconds later, as she arrived on the scene, a second explosion ripped through the air."

Ahrens said neighbours were scrambling to help one another as she tried to evacuate as many people as she could.

"The neighbourhood really came together, trying to help each other out," she said.

Community steps in to help blast victims

From clothing to cash, from food to toys, people from Georgina and beyond are rushing to the aid of three Keswick families hit by tragedy Thursday.

Trust funds have been set up at two banks, area merchants are donating goods and services and neighbours are organizing clothing, food and toy drives.

Thursday's early morning blast, believed to be a natural gas explosion, levelled one home, killing a father of two and severely damaging two adjoining homes.

Terry Shaw was killed only moments after his wife and two daughters had left their home at 3 Newlands Ave.

The family at 5 Newlands and the family at 1 Newlands aren't much better off, said friend Sharon Bowers.

Bowers has started a clothing and food drive for the families. She can be reached by calling 476-6118.

The Keswick branch of National Bank, along with Big Sisters of York, the Georgina Board of Trade and The Era-Banner newspaper have combined to open a trust account.

Meanwhile, the Royal Bank and McDonald's in Keswick are working on a trust fund earmarked for the Shaw family.

The account number at the National Bank is 23626. The Royal Bank account number is 5006838.

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