

**ONE KILLED, ONE CRITICALLY BURNED**

**Quick Thinking May Have Averted Further Tragedy In Electrical Accident At Ocean Isle**

BY SUSAN USHER

Quick thinking by those responding to an electrical accident at Ocean Isle Beach last Wednesday that killed one vinyl siding installer and critically burned another may have averted further tragedy, says the town's fire chief.

James "Frank" Braswell Jr., 55, of Conway, S.C., was dead on arrival at The Brunswick Hospital of cardiac arrest due to electrical shock. His co-worker, Bobby Sweat or Sweatt, 33, also of Conway, remained in critical condition Tuesday evening in the Jaycees Burn Center at UNC Hospitals.

Sweat was transferred by a Charlotte-based air ambulance service Wednesday afternoon, flying out of Ocean Isle Beach Airport to Chapel Hill. In addition to internal injuries he received second- and third-degree burns over approximately two-thirds of his body, said Lt. Mark Gore of the Shallotte Volunteer Rescue Squad.

The two men were taking down an aluminum extension ladder shortly after noon Wednesday when the ladder fell against what rescue workers described as a 7,200-volt overhead electrical transmission line.

Ocean Isle Beach Fire Chief Dave Harrell said taking down an extension ladder usually involves one worker holding the ladder and pushing it slightly away from the building, while a second person climbs several steps up the ladder to release it.

"Apparently when he (Braswell) pushed the ladder away it got out of his control and fell against the wire," Harrell said.

The work site accident was routinely investigated by the N.C. Department of Labor last week, spokesman Jenny Beth Kennedy said Friday, with the findings due in December.

Harrell praised all those involved for "doing exactly the right thing," averting injury to others. Some Ocean Isle Beach firefighters, including Harrell, double as first re-

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—Dave Harrell, OIB Fire Chief

sponders for medical emergencies, caring for victims until emergency medical technicians arrive.

"I'm so proud of our people," he said, referring to department members and others involved in the incident. "Everybody on the scene did everything they were supposed to do: they got help en route immediately, they pushed the ladder away safely, they began CPR."

Subcontractors for Coastal Vinyl & Aluminum of Shallotte, the two men had put the final touches on a vinyl siding installation at a home under construction at 155 East 2nd Street. After taking a break inside, Braswell and Sweat went to remove their ladder, telling the two wallpaper hangers inside they were leaving.

About this time, George Folsbee of Shallotte Electric & Plumbing Supply arrived and was unloading plumbing fixtures inside the house. According to Harrell, Folsbee said those inside heard a noise outside that sounded like someone sanding. When the noise continued, one of the women checked. Hearing her scream, Folsbee ran out.

"The two men were lying on the ground, still touching the ladder. Electricity was still shooting through them," said Harrell. "Thank God he thought to use the board. He pushed the ladder off the wire with a board before he began treating the most serious victim."

One of the women flagged down passing motorist Avram Muller, a new Ocean Isle Beach resident who

who was in cardiac arrest, unresponsive and never regained vital signs. A bystander offered help as well, while Muller evaluated the scene for safety, then cleared Sweat's throat.

Assistant Fire Chief Al Crawford, a first responder, arrived and began stabilizing Sweat, who was in electrical shock. Sweat was taken by EMTs to The Brunswick Hospital, stabilized further, then flown to Chapel Hill later Wednesday by fixed-wing aircraft.

Muller said he had joined the fire department only six weeks earlier out of a desire to help his new community and was impressed by everyone's efforts Wednesday. The first responders and EMTs "did everything they could" to save Braswell's life and to maintain Sweat's, he said.

Harrell said a regional critical incident team held a debriefing last week to help those involved deal with their reactions to the incident.

happened to also be a new member of the fire department. Muller said he radioed the 911 center, calling for first responders and the department's pumper used to carry medical emergency equipment and supplies.

"I told them to hurry because it was very serious," he said later that afternoon.

Folsbee had begun cardiopulmonary resuscitation on Braswell,

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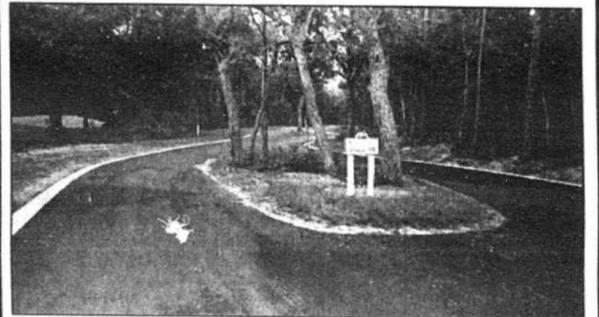
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