Suspicious fire in nursing home leads to 10 deaths

By Kathryn Masterson
Associated Press

HARTFORD, Conn. – A suspicious fire ripped through a nursing home before daybreak Wednesday, killing 10 people and forcing more than 100 residents – some of them bedridden, elderly and confused – into the freezing cold. A resident was being questioned by police.

The blaze at the Greenwood Health Center also injured 23 people, seven critically. Many of the injured were already chronically ill.

"It's certainly the worst fire we've had in the city of Hartford for several decades," Fire Chief Charles Teale said.

Police took a 23-year-old woman into custody for questioning.

"There will be a lot of questions if her mental capacity was a factor," Lt. Michael Manzi said.

Flames and thick smoke forced residents out of the building and into the darkness. The home cares for coma patients and elderly or retarded people, and rescuers had to struggle to take many of them out on gurneys and in wheelchairs.

"Upon my arrival, it became apparent that all hands would be needed," Teale said.

Family members flooded the facility's parking lot, some clutching pictures and rosaries as they pleaded for information.

"Where is the fire? Where is the fire?" Mana Cunha sobbed, clutching her temples as she ran toward a police officer. She was looking for her mother, a 97-year-old resident of the home.

Jolene Munz was looking for her 54-year-old uncle.

"He couldn't even have gotten out if he wanted to," she said, wiping away tears from behind her glasses. "He's blind."

The fate of the two residents was not immediately known.

Some families got information they did not want to hear. Luis Henriquez held a silver-framed school photo of his 17-year-old son, who had been in a coma for three years.

Philadelphia Eagles lose key linebacker, best return man

Associated Press

The Philadelphia Eagles could find it a lot more difficult to defend the NFC East title next season.

The team lost two players Monday – linebacker Shawn Barber to Kansas City and Brian Mitchell to the New York Giants. The Eagles also stand to lose their top defensive end and pass rusher, Hugh Douglas, another unrestricted free agent, although they hope to re-sign him.

Barber, one of several sought-after linebackers available this year, signed with a team attempting to bolster a defense that was the NFL's worst statistically last season.

The 34-year-old Mitchell, one of the best return men in NFL history, is expected to provide a major lift to the Giants' special teams, which have been dismal the past three seasons.

Tennessee, meanwhile, re-signed guard Zach Piller, who would have been one of the better offensive linemen available; Atlanta signed former Cincinnati safety Cory Hall; and the New York Jets re-signed fullback Gerald Sowell, who probably will become their starter at that position.

Marty Mornhinweg, fired Jan. 27 as coach of the Detroit Lions, found a new job Monday, as a senior assistant coach for the Eagles. Mornhinweg and Philadelphia coach Andy Reid worked together on Mike Holmgren's staff in Green Bay in the mid-1990s and in college before that.

Both Barber and Mitchell are ex-Redskins once removed. Both began their careers with Washington, which dominated the free-agent market in the three previous years. The team signed eight players, primarily offensive and defensive linemen, and traded for running back Trung Canidate.

Barber signed a seven-year deal with the Chiefs, who finished 8-8, excelling on offense but allowing the most yards in the league last season.

"He possesses the skills, abilities and experience that should improve our defense immediately," Chiefs president Carl Peterson said.

Mitchell, who'll be 35 next season, gives the Giants the kick off and punt returner they've lacked since the days of David Meggett a decade ago. He averaged 12.3 yards on punt returns last year and 27 on kickoffs. He's 21,987 combined yards is second only to Jerry Rice on the NFL career list.