

Families of dozens who died in nightclub fire visit scene

By Matt Apuzzo
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WEST WARWICK, R.I. — For days, they've lived with the video images of their relatives jammed in the doorway of a burning nightclub, many screaming in terror as they struggled in vain to break free.

On Sunday, for the first time, the parents, siblings and children of the dozens of victims who couldn't escape were allowed to walk up to the charred rubble of The Station nightclub to pray and say goodbye.

Their visit came as the death toll from the tragedy was raised to 97, after the governor announced that yet another body had been pulled from amid the debris.

They stepped off buses into the rain outside the club, where firefighters had left dozens of roses for them to hold or place at a makeshift memorial, already piled high with cards and flowers.

At least one person was overcome and taken to an ambulance.

"These families are going through such a tragedy, such an emotional odyssey right now, and their hearts are broken, and they still don't know in many cases whether their loved one has been positively ID'd," said Gov. Don Carcieri, who met with the families several times



Ann Ellis Hickey, left, and her husband Raymond Hickey of West Warwick display a photo, of missing friend Bonnie Hamelin, at the scene of The Station nightclub fire in West Warwick, Rhode Island.

in the days after a rock band's pyrotechnics turned The Station into a raging inferno.

On Sunday, he ordered a no-fly zone within 5 miles of the site to give the families privacy to mourn.

"The agony they've been going through for the last 48 hours almost has turned into what you'd expect, the kinds of questions: 'Why did this happen? Did it have to happen? What caused it to happen? Did some individuals cause it to happen?'" Carcieri said. "We're asking all the same questions."

The band was just getting into its first song Thursday night when sparks from the pyrotechnics ignited foam tiles in the ceiling and quickly spread flames over the crowd of more than 300. Fire officials said the entire building was engulfed in three minutes.

Little remains of the one-story, wooden nightclub today but ashes.

Against one partial wall lean bouquets of flowers, stuffed animals and American flags that police had gathered from mourners, who had been kept behind a chain-link fence several yards from the site. Amid the growing makeshift memorial are high school pictures, poems, even an unopened can of Budweiser.

James Morris, 36, of Warwick, stood outside the fence where a steady stream of mourners stopped Sunday to pay their respects. He said he was supposed to attend the concert Thursday, but didn't feel like going out that night. Six of his friends went without him and haven't been heard from since.

"It's unbelievable," he said, hugging his two sons. "It's just awful. They were all young guys in their 20s, early 30s."

A memorial service was planned Sunday night, described as "prayer unplugged," and mourners were encouraged to bring acoustic guitars to honor the victims.

Forty-two of the 97 people killed in the blaze had been identified by Sunday afternoon, Carcieri said. He said 80 survivors remained hospitalized, about two dozen of them in critical condition.

Three days after the fire, questions remained about whether the heavy metal group Great White had permission to set off the fireworks — and whether anyone should face charges in the deadly blaze.

The club did not have a permit for the special effects. While the leader and an attorney for the band — which returned to

Los Angeles without guitarist Ty Longley, missing since the blaze — have said the group got permission from the club before setting off the special effects, the club's owners insist they never approved pyrotechnics use.

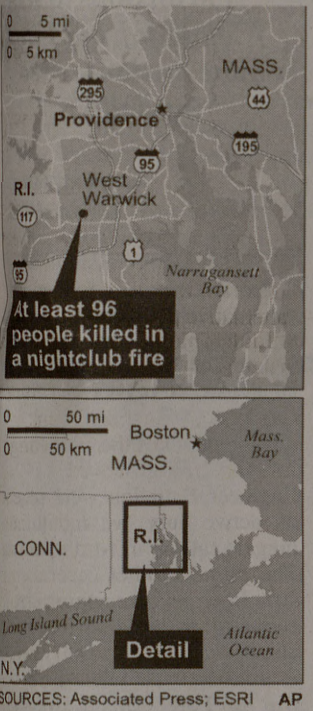
"It was a total shock to me to see the pyrotechnics going off when Great White took the stage," said Jeffrey Derderian, a Providence television reporter who had owned the club with his brother since 2000.

Derderian spoke publicly Saturday, breaking down in tears and struggling to regain his composure as he talked about the victims.

"This tragedy has claimed the lives of our friends," he said, "people who are husbands, wives, mothers, fathers, sons and daughters. We will somehow live with this grief, like so many other people, for the rest of our lives."

Derderian was at the club the night of the fire and said he tried to help as many people as he could get out alive.

"It is very difficult to express what I experienced in the club that night," he said. "Please know I tried as hard as I could," he said, choking up and bowing his head. "Many people didn't make it out and that is a horror our family will live with."



At least 96 people killed in a nightclub fire

Transplant death leaves questions unanswered

By Laura Meckler
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — When a heart and matching lungs were donated in Boston two weeks ago, a computer generated a list of patients medically compatible and awaiting transplants.

But the recipient of those organs — 17-year-old Jessica Santillan — failed to make the list because, as tragically evident later, her blood type did not match.

Her family came to the United States from Mexico so she could get a transplant, and she had waited for three years when the organs from Boston became available on Feb. 6.

They came from someone with blood type A. Jessica had type O. Her body rejected the organs, she became critically ill and, despite receiving a second set of organs Thursday, died Saturday.

Officials at Duke University Medical Center in North Carolina have said they failed to ask about the blood type and have taken responsibility for the error.

But why were the first set of organs even offered by transplant coordinators?

Experts in the organ matching system say a mistake like this might occur if a transplant coordinator is having trouble finding a patient who will take the organs.

Despite the acute shortage, some donated organs are damaged, so doctors are reluctant to take them. If they come from a child, as may have been the case here, the organs might be too small for most people on the waiting list.

If a transplant coordinator is having trouble finding a match from the official list of waiting patients, the coordinator might start contacting doctors to see if they have a patient who can use the organs.

"You may call some major (transplant) centers and say, 'I don't want these organs to go to waste. Do you have anybody?'" said Howard Nathan, executive director of the Gift of Life Donor Program in Philadelphia. "The most important thing is to give the organ to a needy patient."

It is not clear what happened in Jessica's case, nor are details known about the donor.

Could someone on the list have benefited from the organs? Were they offered to everyone on the list before Jessica got them? Whatever the rationale, the informal matching used in this instance worries some.

"The way we engender trust is by having a system that's accountable," said Dr. John Holman, a kidney transplant surgeon at the University of Utah. He is chairman of the organ procurement committee for the United Network of Organ Sharing.

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on Jones took home seven... is at Sunday night's Grammys.

ong for the mournful tune... dia.Arie, who was nominated... seven Grammys last year... ost them all, finally got her... two, winning for best urban... native performance for... le Things" and best R&B... for "Voyage to India... among the other winners... ously unheralded Funk... ers. The groundbreaking... band for Motown... rds, the focus of the recent... mentary "Standing in the... ows of Motown," won two... ies.

ome other veteran artists... d to bulging trophy cases... man B.B. King won two... 3 in his career, while... y Cash won his 11th and... Bennett his 10th — while... egend Solomon Burke won... st.

"We got a Grammy, baby!"... said as he hoisted his... my.

the disc "Vaughn Williams... Symphony" garnered... awards, including best... cal album.

the show opened with Dustin... an — one in a revolving... of New York-based hosts... roducing a reunion per... nce by lifetime achieve... ward winners Simon and... nkel. The pair, who sang... Sound of Silence," have... a tumultuous relationship... as their first performance... er in a decade.

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