

Rhode Island nightclub fire death toll rises by one

By Michael Mello
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PROVIDENCE, R.I. — William Kelly sat in a driving rain outside Grace Church on Sunday, waiting to hear the bells toll for his niece, the latest victim of one of the country's deadliest nightclub fires.

"I keep asking the Lord, 'why?'" said Kelly, 57. "She was such a sweetheart."

Across Rhode Island and Massachusetts on Sunday, church bells pealed 98 times, once for each person killed in the Feb. 20 inferno at The Station nightclub and for the two who later died of their burns. Kelly's niece, Kelly Viera, died in a hospital Saturday.

"We thought she was in for a long, hard grind," he said, fighting back tears. His 40-year-old niece, who lived in Warwick, was married and had two daughters, he said.

Viera and her husband, Scott, were among more than 300 people who had packed into The Station in West Warwick that night to hear the '80s heavy

metal band Great White.

Fire investigators believe sparks from the band's pyrotechnic display ignited the nightclub's soundproofing material, triggering a fire that swept through the one-story wooden building in minutes as panicked concertgoers tried to flee.

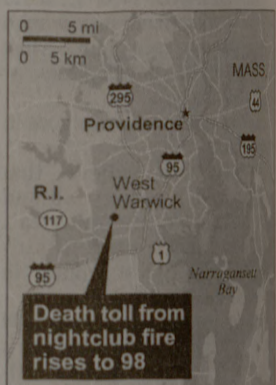
Scott Viera escaped, but his wife was severely burned. "He's beating himself up because he managed to get out and she didn't," Kelly said.

On Sunday, 51 people injured in the fire remained hospitalized in Rhode Island and Massachusetts, including 33 in critical condition.

A grand jury is investigating the blaze. No charges have been filed.

Officials in West Warwick, where the club was located, were expected to release documents Monday related to the club's history that could include building and fire inspections. The club had passed a fire inspection in December but wasn't required to have sprinklers.

Gov. Don Carcieri asked that all Rhode Islanders pause Sunday "to remember those



Death toll from nightclub fire rises to 98

SOURCES: Associated Press; ESRI

who have suffered physically and emotionally" following the blaze.

Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney, asked residents there to observe a moment of silence, said the lives lost will "remain forever in our hearts."

Air Force Academy rape scandal leads to community questions

By Robert Weller
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. — As a song lamenting the fate of a wounded soldier plays on the VFW Post jukebox behind him, Bob Campbell talks with disgust in his voice of the treatment some young cadets say they've been getting from the Air Force Academy.

"I think it is terrible that these kinds of things can happen. It should be an honor to be there," the Vietnam veteran says of reports that female cadets were punished by the academy after reporting they had been raped or sexually assaulted by upperclassmen.

"I believe it is going on now — and has been in the past," he says.

Across this spit-and-polish military town of 500,000, Campbell's sentiment echoes among the civilians as well as the military employees and retirees who make up more than a fifth of the population.

"This is a terrible black mark on the academy," says retired Air Force Col. Dick Rauschkolb, who directed the office of enrollment programs at the academy. "We want the best and brightest to come here."

Since late January, at least 22 female cadets have said they were ostracized or reprimanded for minor infractions after they reported being raped by upperclassmen. The Air Force is conducting investigations and at least four senators have called for an outside investigation, which Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. John Jumper has said he

would welcome.

Academy Superintendent Lt. Gen. John Dallyagher, speaking Friday on ABC's "20/20," said it was as serious as the 1991 Tailhook scandal, when women at a hotel were groped or assaulted by drunken pilots at a Navy booster group's convention.

At Colorado Spring's primary rape and crisis center, counselors have helped 22 alleged rape or assault victims from the academy, said Carl Davis, the center's executive director.

She said many of them are afraid to complain for fear they'll lose their chances to advance in the military.

"If you want to be a fighter pilot, you don't have any other options," she said.

On the academy campus beyond the large letters at the entrance that spell out, "Bring Me Men," young men and women in uniform walk from the coed dorms to their classes along the wooded hillsides of Pikes Peak.

The property is closed to the public because of heightened security measures, but during an appearance last week by Air Force Secretary James Roche, military public relations officials escorted reporters in to speak with some of the cadets.

Two female cadets, both members of a voluntary group set up to help victims of assaults, said the students at the academy work together to overcome gender barriers. About 4,000 cadets a year train at the academy, created in 1954. It opened its doors to the first female cadets in 1976.

"This is a terrible black mark on the academy. We want the best and the brightest to come here."

— Dick Rauschkolb
Retired Air Force Col.

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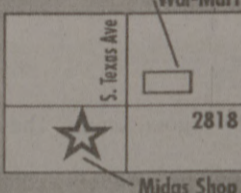
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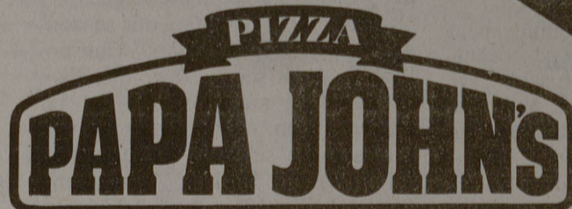
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