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Local News

Police: Man admits slaying and arson *Woman's body found in bedroom of home on Robbins Avenue*

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St. Joseph Township firefighters put out a blaze Monday at 273 Robbins Ave. The homeowner told police he killed his wife before setting the house on fire. Peter W. Fister photo

By JULIE SWIDWA - and SCOTT AIKEN - H-P Staff Writers

Published: Tuesday, March 24, 2009 1:08 PM EDT

BENTON HARBOR — A neighborhood was in shock Monday after a St. Joseph Township man who claimed he killed his wife and set fire to their house surrendered at the Berrien County Sheriff's Department.

A woman's body was found in a bedroom at the house at 273 Robbins Ave. Monday morning after firefighters contained the blaze, St. Joseph Township Police Chief Ross Bates said.

Police did not identify the couple, but a neighbor, the Rev. James Atterberry, said Danny and Tina Stevens lived at the house, which is in St. Joseph Township but just outside the Benton Harbor city limits. He said the couple has grown children and no one else lived there.

The suspect was being held at the county jail, Bates said. Investigators were continuing to search the house for evidence.

Atterberry, a member of the Michigan Parole Board, is normally in Lansing during the week. He said he was in town for a funeral and, after the funeral, heard that Stevens had shot his wife and then burned the house

down.

"This is a total shock. He was such a nice guy. I don't understand what happened. Nobody can figure out what happened. Everybody's in shock," Atterberry said.

"Everybody is just standing around, consoling each other."

He said the neighborhood is usually quiet and, "we don't have any trouble over here."

St. Joseph Township police were assisted by the state police fire marshal's office and the state police crime laboratory in Grand Rapids.

Bates said firefighters responded to a 10:01 a.m. call at the Robbins Avenue home. Subsequently, a man who lives in the house turned himself in at the sheriff's department in St. Joseph and confessed to shooting his wife and burning the house, Bates said.

The man gave a statement to St. Joseph Township police and was booked at the county jail. His name was being withheld by police pending charges being filed.

The house was extensively damaged by the fire, Bates said. The victim's body was to be taken to a hospital in Grand Rapids for an autopsy.

Berrien County Prosecutor Arthur Cotter said he expected to authorize charges after completing a review of the case. He said the suspect would likely be arraigned this afternoon.

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