

FROM A1

Illinois town of 117 people loses five in murder-suicide

The Associated Press

PONTIAC, Ill. — A burst of gunfire sent Annelise Fiedler running out of her home to see what the noise was. In the yard next door, she saw 30-year-old Sara McMeen hovering over her baby as if she had dropped her. Fiedler asked McMeen if everything was all right.

"She looked at me and said, 'No, everything is not all right,'" Fiedler said.

Then, Fiedler said, McMeen shot the baby. Fiedler fled for her life.

While authorities in the small Illinois farming community remained tight-lipped Saturday about the details of what they said was a murder-suicide that left five people dead, neighbors described shocking violence that took place outside in full view of their homes. Some could see two of the children's bodies from their windows.

The dead included McMeen, her live-in boyfriend 29-year-old Daniel Warren and her three children, 8-year-old Skyler Lemke, 7-year-old Ian Lemke and 10-month-old Maggie Warren, authorities said.

Livingston County Sheriff Martin Meredith would not identify the shooter or disclose a possible motive for the shootings, which happened about 2:30 p.m. Friday.

A school bus had

dropped off Skyler and Ian Lemke, along with several of their friends, moments earlier, neighbors said. The children were excited because it was the last day of school before Christmas break, said Ronald Groetsema, whose 12-year-old son was on the bus.

From his home one street away, Groetsema heard an initial round of six to eight gunshots. A few minutes of silence passed. Then, he heard four to six shots more.

Dave Melton rushed home after getting a frantic call from his wife, who could see McMeen's backyard from her window.

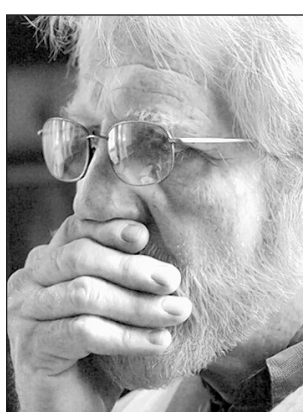
"The kids are dead," she told him.

On Saturday, Melton stood in front of his home and pointed at the yard that backs up to his. A day earlier, he saw Ian Lemke's body on the step leading into the neighboring house and McMeen's and Skyler's bodies about 10 feet away.

"I stood here for a while, like, 'This ain't happening,'" he said.

All five were pronounced dead at the scene. Meredith said investigators found a pistol at the scene.

In a statement issued by authorities, Cynthia McMeen, mother of Sara McMeen, said family members "grieved over the loss of their loved ones."



STEVE SMEDLEY/The Associated Press

Mayor Dan Delaney speaks about being one of the first people to arrive on the scene of the murder-suicide in the small town of Emington, Ill.

"They realize this tragedy ... affects not only their family, but other families as well," she said in the statement. "The family is drawing together during this time, relying on God, and grieving."

Neighbors said Sara McMeen and her family had moved recently to Emington, a town with just 117 residents. Surrounded by miles of farmland, it's a place where "you drive 15 miles in any direction to get to anywhere else," Pam Gansch-Boythe said.

The family rented a home that, according to longtime resident Bob Young, was known as the "banker's house" before the town bank closed years

ago. A woman who said her brother-in-law now owned it declined to comment.

Meredith said the two older children attended school in nearby Saunemin, where Skyler was in second grade and Ian was in first grade. The children were well-known in the neighborhood, but the adults were not.

Fiedler said she had heard a man and woman fighting next door three times over the past few months. She said the couple kept "very much to themselves."

Melton said he had spoken to McMeen "just a little bit," usually when he was in his own backyard.

About 30 people gathered in an Emington church Saturday morning to pray and try to understand what happened. Some residents said they had moved from larger towns to find a quiet place to raise their families.

Beth Barcikowski, who lives across the street from McMeen's home, said her children used to play with the Lemkes.

Skyler would come to their home before and after getting on the school bus, she said.

She's haunted by the idea that the little girl was shot just as she arrived home from school.

"Just wishing she would've come here first," Barcikowski said.

Warrant

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The Guilford County district attorney's office and police decide if extradition or in-state transfer is warranted on a case-by-case basis.

Extradition isn't solely based on the charge or offense, said Greensboro police spokeswoman Susan Danielsen. So police don't always push for blanket national extradition orders for shooting suspects, as in Pride's case.

Assistant District Attorney Howard Neumann says he considers other factors when a detective requests his approval for extradition:

- What are the facts of the case?
- Can it be proved in court?
- Was it a violent or non-violent crime?
- If caught, do authorities fully intend to pick up the person?
- Is it worthwhile to spend money to retrieve the person?

Authorities have to pay travel costs, including meals, lodging and transportation for the officers and the wanted person.

Extradition can involve many agencies, including the police department, sheriff's office, district attorney's office and the U.S. Marshals Service.

The final decision is shared among all involved, Danielsen said.

Neumann said extradition is automatically approved in almost every homicide warrant in which the suspect is not arrested at the crime scene.

"We want to make sure that if they're found in Tennessee or Idaho or wherever, that they're apprehended," he said. "And we also want to make sure that the U.S. marshals will help us."

Extradition can be applied to North Carolina from one state, from surrounding states and from states east of the Mississippi River, for example. Greensboro Detective M.V. Francis had no inkling that Pride would flee to New York. From the information he gathered, police thought they could pick Pride up locally.

Francis consulted with the district attorney's office, which agreed to approve the fugitive's return to Greensboro in-state only.

When Pride was arrested on Nov. 3, a New

York officer called the Greensboro Police Department's records section listed on the warrants at 10:44 p.m., police said. He told staff that Pride was in custody and asked about the extradition order.

The Greensboro clerk reviewed the records, which were entered into a national criminal database, and confirmed that there was no approval for national extradition.

Pride was released from jail Nov. 4, unbeknownst to Greensboro police.

A New York officer called at 1:43 p.m. Nov. 8, asking if Greensboro police would reconsider the order.

The clerk then contacted Francis, who discussed extradition with the New York officer.

Francis and the district attorney's office approved nationwide extradition, entering it into the national database at 3:08 p.m.

Greensboro police Chief Ken Miller said the department might examine whether records clerks should contact detectives sooner if they get extradition inquiries. But on Nov. 3, the clerk acted according to protocol.

"If we tried to, in the middle of the night, undo all these every time there's one that's not in there or there's a no-extradition indicator... then the process is meaningless," he said.

"So we have to look at our process and say, is there something we should be doing differently there so that we're getting the meaningful cases in there," Miller said. "And up to this point there's been no question about whether or not that process works."

In the end, officers can't predict someone's bad behavior, Miller said.

"There's a process established for a reason. The D.A. doesn't have unlimited resources. We don't have unlimited resources," he said.

"Somebody made a choice to do something really, really bad for a reason that really made no sense," he said, speaking of the Figoski shooting. "And he's responsible for that."

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Miller

Economy

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growth.

"Greensboro has lost ground over the last few months," the report said. "(It) now stands nearly 10 percent below its pre-recession level of employment."

These recent reports help explain why unemployment has remained so high in the Greensboro-High Point metro area, which includes Guilford, Rockingham and Randolph counties.

In October, joblessness in the region stood at 10.1 percent.

According to the reports, here's why.

The Brookings report looked at two factors: how well a specific area's mix of industries performed during the recession and the qualifications of workers for available jobs.

The report ranked the performance of the nation's 100 largest metro areas in those two categories. It gave Greensboro-High Point a combined rank of 99th.

"Greensboro is faced with two difficult problems," said Jonathan Rothwell, a senior research analyst at Brookings. "The most pressing is that its most prevalent industries have not performed well during the recession, for example, textiles, construction and furniture."

"Not only that, but the average worker in Greensboro isn't educated to the level required by the jobs available. That will translate into higher unemployment and a protracted recovery."

Rothwell said the average job in Greensboro requires 13.36 years of education and the average working-age adult has 13.25 years of schooling.

While that "education gap" doesn't appear that significant, it compares unfavorably with a city such as Raleigh.

There, the typical job requires 13.67 years of education, but the average worker has completed 14.18 years of schooling.

"That's considerably above Greensboro," Rothwell said, noting that from 2005 to 2011 areas with large education gaps had consistently higher unemployment rates than other metros.

For example, the unemployment rate for the Raleigh metro area stood at 8

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percent in October, more than 2 percentage points lower than in the Greensboro-High Point area.

Locally, the report said, workers with a bachelor's degree or higher had an unemployment rate in 2009 of 4 percent. However, those with a high school diploma or less had a jobless rate of 12.9 percent.

"There aren't enough jobs for workers with high school diplomas or less in the Greensboro area," Rothwell said. "That adds somewhere between 1 and 2 percentage points to the area's unemployment rate."

"Compounding that kind of long-term problem, Greensboro was concentrated in manufacturing industries that were devastated by the national financial crisis. The decline in Greensboro's manufacturing was accelerated by the recession."

What's more, the area remains highly dependent on manufacturing.

The Wells Fargo report said that about 20 percent of the area's employment is tied to manufacturing,

which remains depressed in the wake of multiple plant closures during the past decade.

At the same time, the report said, the industry has seen "relentless technological improvement" over the years. Because of this increased automation, a large number of unemployed and unprepared workers can't find jobs or can't qualify for those that are available.

The failure to put this population to work, the report says, has become "a drag to economic growth" in the state in general and Greensboro-High Point in particular.

"Greensboro is the city that most closely mirrors this problem," said Michael Brown, an economist with Wells Fargo, and co-author of the report. "If there is an area that is being held back, it is Greensboro, and this is the underlying theme."

In addition, the area's employment dropped by 0.3 percent during the third quarter while economic output increased by

0.4 percent.

"That's exactly what we are talking about," Brown said. "We are producing goods in Greensboro. The fact is we do not need as many individuals to do so."

Various reports have predicted when the Greensboro-High Point area might recover the nearly 40,000 jobs it lost during and after the recession.

Last summer, Moody's Analytics forecast that wouldn't happen until late 2020.

"I wouldn't be surprised," said Wial, the Brookings economist. "That's consistent with other forecasts I have seen."

But Wial did offer one bit of encouragement. He doesn't expect the area to slip back into another recession. But even that comes with a caveat. It depends on the outcome of the European financial crisis.

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