

Ruth E. ZELLNER

Wednesday, July 30, 1986

Services Services for Mrs. Ruth E. ZELLNER, 66, of Mountainview Apts, Slatington, who was killed Thursday when a crane crashed into the apartment building where she resided, will be at 1:30 pm Thursday in the Charles H. Campton Funeral Home, 525 Delaware Ave., Palmerton. Calling hours will be noon Thursday until services. She was the wife of Joseph ZELLNER. They observed their 46th Wedding anniversary in April. Born in Berlinsville, she was a daughter of the late Charles and Blanche Brown. She was a member of Bethany Wesleyan Church, Cherryville. Surviving with her husband are three daughters, Charlotte, wife of Bruce R. Fritzinger and Barbara, wife of Edgar H. Finley, both of Walnutport and Elizabeth, wife of Kenneth E. Osborne of Slatington, four grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

Friday, July 25, 1986

A 75 ton mobile crane apparently lost its brakes coming down Slatington's three-quarter mile Main Street Hill yesterday and slammed into the Mountainview Apartments [Slatington, Pennsylvania] for the elderly, killing two people and injuring at least three others, according to authorities. Rescue crews worked quickly to get survivors out for fear the building might collapse. Most of the 46 elderly residents of the subsidized, low-income project were at home when the crash came at 9:56 am. Crews using heavy equipment worked into last night deciding how to extricate the crane, embedded in the front right corner of the four-story building at 550 Main St., "We hear it crash and then we heard screaming. Dust and dirt was flying all over the place, Women were screaming", said Paul Horner, who owns Horner's Coin Laundry on Main Street. Todd Green of Slatington said he was about to enter the Turkey Hill Mini Mart one block to the south when he saw the crane pass at a high rate of speed. "He never went around the turn", said Green. "Everything shook, and then a big cloud of dust went up." One victim, Ruth ZELLNER, 66, was pronounced dead at 10:59 am in the remains of apartment 209, directly above the point of impact. A second victim Charles Moyer, 69, was pronounced dead at 11:40 am. after he was found below in the first floor community room, according to Lehigh County Deputy Coroner Wayne Snyder. Joseph ZELLNER, husband of Ruth ZELLNER, was transported to Palmerton Hospital, where he was admitted with cuts, bruises and possible internal injuries, according to an emergency room nurse. Snyder said Joseph ZELLNER had apparently been sitting at a kitchen table in his apartment, and was somehow ejected through the apartment door

into the hallway. Ruth ZELLNER allegedly was in bed when the crane struck the building, and her body was found in the kitchen area near the stove, said Snyder. The driver of the crane, Bruce Berner, 32, and his passenger, Charles Hills, 49, were transported to the Lehigh Valley Hospital Center via Slatedale and North Whitehall ambulances. Berner apparently was treated and discharged, a hospital spokesman said, and Hills, of 1832 Pear St., Philadelphia, was admitted and listed in guarded condition. The crane was being followed by a flat-bed truck, both owned by Mayberry Riggers of Morrestown, N. J. William Starrett of Maple Shade, N. J., driver of the truck, said they were enroute to the New Jersey Zinc Co., in Palmerton to secure a large nitrogen tank onto the flat-bed for transport. About halfway down the hill, said Starrett, the 30 foot crane "started to take off," with its driver downshifting loudly and basing his horn, and he lost sight of it. People stopped on Main Street and stared from store windows. The crane, which left no skid marks, was unable to make the sharp turn at the bottom of the hill and barreled into the right side of the building where it became embedded in brick and glass, missing the town's landmark statue of a fireman by about 20 feet. Rescue crews located two bodies in the rubble shortly after the crash and continued their search for more bodies as the day progressed. There were fears a visitor may have been with Moyer at the time of the crash, but this could not be confirmed. About 16 elderly residents were taken from the home to the Meridian Bank building across the street. There they were calmed down and it was determined which patients were in need of medical treatment. Several were treated at the scene for minor cuts and bruises. Others waited at the bank and were diagnosed as efforts were made to retrieve medication from their apartments. "we had them at the bank and determined who the diabetics and other people were who needed their medications. After that was determined, members of the fire department and the home's maintenance crew went into the home to get the elderly people's medications," said Brian Dressler, a paramedic. "Initially they were pretty shook up." After a brief period at the bank, the elderly were taken to the Slatington Senior Neighborhood Center in the basement of the nearby St. John's United Church of Christ, where they ate lunch and were able to meet their families. There were many tense reunions as families scanned the bank and the church basement for their relatives. Among themselves the residents of Mountainview chatted with one another and listed who they believed were trapped in the building. Two elderly women said they saw the ceiling come down on top of Moyer. "I heard about the crash on the radio and we got scared so we drove up here from Nazareth to make sure everything was Okay," said Loraine Arndt, whose mother, Mable Diehl, is a resident at the home. "You better believe we were relieved when we saw that she was Okay," said Arndt.

For Diehl, yesterday was one chaotic event after another, "I was under the hair dryer when the crash happened, I thought it was thunder. Then the building shook, and the lights went out." But for J. ZELLNER there was no happy reunions Standing outside of the home and staring at the crane embedded in the building, ZELLNER said "My grandmother, I'm told is dead and my grandfather is in stable condition. God, it just one of those things. They just moved in June, and they were so happy because they had been on a waiting list for about a year." DeForrest Spadt, a ground floor resident of Mountainview, said he was in bed when the crash came, "I though it was an airplane," he said. Fred Barlton, also a resident, said he was on a front bench smoking a cigarette, "I saw the truck go across the lawn," he said. Dr. E. M. Torbey, a dentist whose home and office are a few yards form Mountainview, gave this account: "our family was out working on the house and then the first thing that went through my mind is, "What the devil is this?", I was immediately concerned because I thought it could have hit my daughter, who was standing on the blacktop between our house and the home. I ran to the home and looked around but didn't see anybody. Torbey, who treats a number of Elderly from the home, continues, "So, I went to the driver who craled out of the truck and saw that a passenger was trapped inside. I tried to move some bricks, and I saw that he was bleeding, so I got him a towel for his head. I was also concerned that it would burst into flames." Crowds began forming quickly as police and fire officials cordoned off the area. Spectators watched as the injured were taken from the building to ambulances. "It's just a miracle that crane didn't hit any cars. Usually there is a whole ine of cars coming up the other way, " Said Charlie Henry. Ronald Hausman, Slatington Fire Co's Assistant Chief, said that when he arrived on the scene, the crane's engine was still running, "but we were able to get inside the building and shut it off." The residents of the apartment building did not panic, he said, as they evacuated in an orderly row. "They knew the situation, he said" and what was going on." Hausman cited the excellent teamwork of the emergency agencies. At least five fire companies including Slatington, Friedens, Diamond (Walnutport) Schnecksville and Neffs were on the scene. MedEvac and Palmerton fire Co, were on standby; ambulances on the scene included Lehigh Township, Slatedale, Cetronia and Tri-Clover, plus the Whitehall Rescue Unit and the Northampton Emergeny Squad, Slatedale, Emerald and Slatington fire police assited with traffic, and Lehigh County Civil Defense set up its mobiel communications center. At least two firemen collapsed with heat exhaustion and were treated with oxygen and cold compresses. At St. John's, Red Cross volunteers set up a medical comman post and retrieved "Vials of Life" Containing personal and medical information from Mountainview refrigerators. Three Red Cross volunteer nurses conducted follow-up

interviews. Lynn Furr, director of community resources, said the Red Cross's main concern was to take care of the medication needs of the Mountainview residents and in some cases, fill new prescriptions at a nearby pharmacy. No major medical problems resulted, she said. "People are upset, but everybody is settling down, and we are contracting their families," said Jane Duld, apartment house manager, as she carried white plastic bags of Medication to the church shelter. Initial plans to set up cots in a church for the homeless overnight were changed by mid-afternoon when all displaced residents had found friends or relatives to stay with. Mountainview is managed by the Allentown Housing Authority, (AHA) and owned by Lehigh Housing Development Corp., a non-profit private development corporation. Paul Zimmerman, AHA executive director, said the building built in 1979, would be salvageable. Last night, just how to remove the crane from the side of the building kept fire companies on the scene. Mayberry Riggers requested a 250foot crane from AmQuip, a heavy equipment company in Bensalem Township, Bucks County, and it was on its way yesterday afternoon, but builders called to the scene recommended shoring up the damaged corner of the building before attempting to pull out the crane. Slatington Police Chief Arthur Kistler said the crane would be impounded and inspected by state police to determine the cause of the malfunction. Mrs. ZELLNER and her husband observed their 46th wedding anniversary in April. Born in Berlinsville, she was a daughter of the late Charles and Blanche Brown. She was a member of Bethany Wesleyan Church, Cherryville. Surviving with her husband are three daughters, Charlotte, wife of Bruce R. Fritzinger, and Barbara, wife of Edgar H. Finley, both of Walnutport and Elizabeth, wife of Kenneth E. Osborne of Slatington, four grandchildren and five great-grandchildren. Services will be announced by the Charles H. Campton Funeral Home, 525 Delaware Ave., Palmerton.
