

GLUM & GLUMMER
Increasing clouds today with showers arriving by this evening; rain tomorrow.
Forecast, E10

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Two bodies recovered after fire at Cumberland house

Investigators were gathering dental records late yesterday afternoon to help in the identification.

BY BRANDIE JEFFERSON
PROJO.COM STAFF WRITER

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JOURNAL STAFF WRITERS

CUMBERLAND — Robert Joly had just awakened and was sipping a bottle of water when a loud blast shattered the predawn quiet off Nate Whipple Highway yesterday morning.

The 71-year-old former fire chief groggily assumed he had heard an electrical transformer exploding on a utility pole, but then an alarmed neighbor arrived, alerted by the blazing house behind the Joly property.

It was the 3,300-square-foot home of a popular couple: 61-year-old Norman V. Langelier, a North Attleboro businessman, and his 60-year-old wife, Beatrice

Langelier.

Firefighters converged on the house at 4:30 a.m. and by early afternoon, authorities had recovered the remains of a man and a woman.

As of late last night, the police had not identified them and the circumstances surrounding the explosion and fire were unclear. There was no indication of forced entry to the house, Cumberland Police Chief John Desmarais said.

He expects the medical examiner's office to report the cause of the deaths today.

Investigators were gathering dental records late yesterday afternoon to help in the identification, he said. Without naming the Langeliers, Desmarais acknowledged investigators had neither

seen nor heard from residents of the house at 500 Nate Whipple Highway.

The police are treating the case as a crime until their investigation proves otherwise, and the cause of the fire is the focus of an investigation by the state fire marshal's office, Desmarais said.

"We believe the fire started with an explosion and was followed by a second explosion," he said.

Neighbors, including Joly, saw flames shooting 30 feet into the air. Joly, a former Marine, said he couldn't get too close because he recognized the rat-tat-tat sound of exploding ammunition.

Langelier, who belongs to a local gun club, kept pistols, rifles and ammunition in the house, Joly said.

"I heard pop, pop, pop like that," he said. "That's ammunition popping off."



THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / BILL MURPHY

The house at 500 Nate Whipple Highway in Cumberland is largely destroyed yesterday morning before a crew could bring the fire under control.

SEE FIRE, B6

CARING FOR THE MENTALLY ILL



THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / KRIS CRAIG

Nurse Marie Marsh, left, and Teresa Buonaiuto, right, walk Teresa's brother Eddie down the hall of the Virks Building at Eleanor Slater Hospital in Cranston on their way to a community room during a visit. Below, the exterior of the Virks Building.

A change of direction

The planned closing of the Virks Building at Eleanor Slater Hospital means patients such as Eddie will be moved to a facility that some say isn't suited to handle them.

BY FELICE J. FREYER
JOURNAL MEDICAL WRITER

CRANSTON

Whenever Eddie has to relocate, he goes to pieces.

Eddie is 70 years old and suffers from schizophrenia and mental retardation. Any disruption of his routine sends him into a tailspin. He lashes out, hitting other people.

"He has an impulse-control issue," says his nurse, Marie Marsh.

That's why Eddie's sister, Teresa Buonaiuto, 77, of Providence, is worried about what will happen when the state closes Eddie's current home, the Virks Building at Eleanor Slater Hospital, and moves him into another building at the hospital. The shutdown is expected within the next two weeks.

"We really don't want to see him move," says Buonaiuto. "They need a place for these kinds of people."

The closing of Virks is part of the Carcieri administration's little-noticed effort to shrink the only state-owned



hospital in Rhode Island, which serves many types of chronically ill people. In the past year, the hospital's census has fallen from 360 to 300 patients, and 95 workers have been laid off.

More than a year ago, the hospital stopped admitting patients like Eddie — elderly, mentally ill people who also have behavioral or medical problems — who were kept at Virks. Gradually the rest are being moved out of Virks, some to nursing homes, some to other buildings at the state hospital.

Ellen R. Nelson, director of the state Department of Mental Health, Retardation and Hospitals, says the change springs from "a positive convergence" of fiscal and clinical needs. In her view, patients who don't need hospital care are finding more comfortable digs in nursing homes, saving taxpayers about \$825 per day, while patients such as Eddie are moving from a decrepit building into more practical quarters.

But people who work at the hospital

SEE VIRKS, A7

R.I. doctor accused of \$3 million in fraud

Federal prosecutors accuse Dr. Tarek Wehbe of billing Medicare and Medicaid for services never performed and drugs never administered.

BY SCOTT MacKAY
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

PROVIDENCE — Federal prosecutors are seeking \$3 million from Dr. Tarek W. Wehbe, an internist with the Renaissance Medical Group in Providence, who the federal government accuses of fraudulently billing Medicare, Medicaid and private insurers for services he did not perform.

Wehbe, who had his license suspended last week by Rhode Island Health Director Dr. David R. Gifford, is accused of billing for services he didn't perform, inflating the type of treatment he provided and billing for days consisting of more than 24 hours.

The complaint filed in U.S. District Court in Providence asserts that Wehbe billed for visits and treatments that, if performed properly, would have taken more than 24 hours in a single day. For example, Wehbe billed for 87 patient visits on March 7, 2006, according to the complaint. According to federal standards, the time needed to see that many patients would have been more than 30 hours.

SEE DOCTOR, B6

R.I. education commissioner leaving in 2009

Peter McWalters counts a new high school diploma system and implementing statewide testing among his accomplishments.

BY JENNIFER D. JORDAN
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

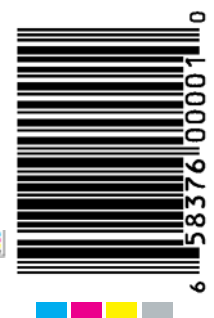
PROVIDENCE — Peter McWalters, one of the nation's longest-serving state education commissioners, will step down next year — a decision that follows a month of closed-door discussions among Governor Carcieri, McWalters and the state board that oversees public education about whether to extend his contract.

Yesterday, Robert G. Flanders Jr., chairman of the state Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education, announced the Regents had agreed to extend McWalters' contract by six months, expiring June 30, 2009. Last month, McWalters had informed the



McWALTERS

SEE McWALTERS, A7



INSIDE TODAY

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6 SECTIONS			
Ask Amy	E8	Local News	D1
Bridge	E8	Lotteries	C4
Business	F1	Obituaries	D4
Classified	F9	People	E1
Comics	E5	Rhode Island	B1
Crossword	E8	Sports	C1
Editorial	B4	Television	E7
Legal ads	A9	What's Happening	E8
Lifeline	E1		
Movies	E1		

BUSH PUTS OFF TROOP WITHDRAWALS

After the troops deployed to Iraq as part of last year's "surge" are withdrawn by July, President Bush says Gen. David Petraeus will "have all the time he needs" to decide whether additional reductions in U.S. force levels are possible. **A4**

THE CROWDED SKIES

The weekend before April school vacation, already one of the busiest times at T.F. Green Airport, could become even more challenging this year as American Airlines continues to cancel hundreds of flights as it re-inspects its aircraft. **F1**

CASE CLOSED ON LINCOLN COURTHOUSE

Facing heavy local resistance, state officials abandon plans to build a \$71-million Blackstone Valley Courthouse in Lincoln, saying the complex will instead be built in Smithfield. **B1**



THANKS BUT NO THANKS

UMass basketball coach Travis Ford turns down Providence College's offer to coach the Friars. **C1**