

Boy pleading for help dies in fire

Flames push neighbors back after they break window in attempted rescue in E. St. Louis.



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Samuel McClain, 33, comforts his friend Ira Ward, 28, Sunday afternoon in front of the burned-out home where Ward and other family members lived on North 70th Street in East St. Louis. Ward's cousin Darius Addison, 11, was killed in the fire. Ward, who lost two cousins in a fire about 10 years ago, said he tried to save the boy, but the flames drove him back.

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Darius Addison died banging his fists on the bedroom window as flames surrounded him inside his grandmother's home in East St. Louis.

"Let me out!" neighbors said the 11-year old boy yelled during the early Sunday morning blaze. "Let me out!"

Neighbors from across the street say they saw the boy at the window, heard his screams and rushed to save him.

Marlon Miller, 18, said he and other nearby residents smashed the bedroom

window. Flames leaped out, preventing them from going inside.

"Gene," as Darius was called by friends and family, apparently was the last of about a dozen family members who had been asleep inside. The others escaped without injury.

Neighbors saw Gene's grandmother, identified by authorities as Pauline Spears, run from the house.

"She said, 'Get the kids out! Get the kids out!'" said Shelia Young, a neighbor

from across the street.

Ira Ward, 28, Gene's cousin, who was next door, ran to the burning house at 701 North 70th Street on the east side of East St. Louis. He said he kicked in the rear door and started a room-to-room search until flames drove him back outside.

"I had to take in my breath," he said.

He ran to the front of the building

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Corps blasted over flood

Poor planning alleged •

Officials along river's route say the agency mismanaged dams, contributing to the biggest flooding in decades.

BY BILL LAMBRECHT

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WASHINGTON • A high-ranking Army Corps of Engineers officer is defending his agency against complaints that mismanagement of dams along the Missouri River has contributed to flooding that threatens communities and farmland.

Col. Robert Ruch, commander of the corps' Omaha District — where decisions on Missouri River management take place — asserted in an interview that Army engineers could not possibly have anticipated the freakish rains last month that set in motion emergency operations at dams that will continue through August.

Ruch and other corps officials also disputed a warning from a former U.S. Geological Survey official that extreme pressure on dams could trigger catastrophic failure and destruction all the way down to St. Louis.

"I have the best dam safety engineers in the country here in this room, and in this district, and if they're not worried, I'm not worried," Ruch said.

He was responding to concerns up and down the 2,341-mile river about the effects of massive volumes of water that Army engineers are releasing from the Missouri's six major dams.

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