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### **Death in the line of duty**

Albany firefighters mourn Theodore Abriel, who suffered a fatal heart attack while responding to a fire in the South End

By ANNE MILLER

Staff Writer

ALBANY - A 20-year veteran of the Albany Fire Department died Monday after climbing six floors to save lives in a burning high-rise apartment in the South End.

Theodore Abriel, 44, of Slingerlands, collapsed in a hallway after suffering a massive heart attack when he entered Apartment 6E of 2 Lincoln Square, which was empty, police said. Abriel, a married father of four with family roots 140 years deep in the Albany Fire Department, was rushed to Albany Medical Center Hospital, where he was pronounced dead at 5:40 p.m., authorities said.

He is the 48th city firefighter lost in the line of duty, said Fire Chief Robert Forezzi, and the first in two years.

"Today is a very sad day for the city of Albany," Forezzi said. He called Abriel, whose family ties to the Albany Fire Department date to the post-Civil War era, "truly one of Albany's finest.

"Firefighter Abriel had more passion for this job than anyone I know."

Abriel was also on the scene at 38-40 Garfield Place earlier in the day where a fire displaced 18 people from four apartments, according to police. They did not know whether Abriel had entered that building as well.

Police said Abriel was wearing 75 pounds of equipment as he and another member of the department's Rescue Squad climbed the stairs to reach the burning apartment, where a fire had been reported at 4:40 p.m.

Abriel checked the apartment, found no one inside, walked out the apartment door and collapsed in the hallway. Firefighters performed CPR, and he was taken to the hospital's emergency room, police said.

Detective James Miller, the city's Department of Public Safety spokesman, did not know, when asked, how often firefighters are required to pass physical exams, or if Abriel had any prior heart conditions or other health problems.

Answers to those questions probably would have to wait until the morning, after officials had a chance to speak with Abriel's family, Miller said. An autopsy is scheduled for today.

The fire, which was under control by 5:01 p.m., was confined to the apartment, officials said.

At 6 p.m., the only sign of damage in the high-rise were two windows, three floors from the top with broken panes. Forezzi would not comment on an investigation under way into the fire's cause. He would not say whether there was anything suspicious about this blaze.

Monday night, family and firefighters swarmed the hospital lobby, several still in firefighting gear. Fire trucks dotted the entrance to the emergency room parking lot. A rescue squad truck was parked by the emergency room door.

Shortly after 7 p.m., they walked toward the end of a hallway for a moment of silence in honor of their fallen brother.

Mayor Jerry Jennings also visited the hospital Monday night.

"Our hearts and our prayers go out to Teddy's family and the entire Albany Fire Department family," the mayor said in a prepared statement.

Abriel, whose rescue squad is based in Arbor Hill, was part of a family with ties to the beginning of Albany's professional fire department. When the department went from volunteers to paid professionals in 1867, relative Reuben Abriel was one of the

volunteer firemen hired by the new organization. Franklin Abriel, Theodore's grandfather, served as well.

Abriel's late father, Warren Abriel Sr., was a battalion chief. A brother, Henry Abriel, is a retired AFD captain. Another brother is Deputy Fire Chief Warren Abriel Jr. Forezzi said they have several nephews in the department as well.

"I grew up that way," Warren Abriel Jr. told the Times Union for an article about the family's long history. "It's a family business."

Abriel is survived by his wife, Linda, and four children: Christopher, 19, Matt, 17, Teddy Jr., 15 and Erin, 11.

In 1996, Abriel received an annual Humanitarian Award from Whiskers Animal Benevolent League for helping another firefighter rescue an unconscious cat from a bedroom in a burning building.

Abriel's death marks at least the fourth time in recent memory that a firefighter has died from a heart attack soon after answering a call.

In January 2005, Rensselaer Assistant Fire Chief Micheal Falkouski died a little more than 24 hours after he was stricken at a two-alarm blaze.

Exactly a year earlier, Elsmere Fire Chief Kevin Shea, 54, died of a heart attack after responding to a false alarm.

In December 1997, Watervliet Fire Chief Thomas McCormack, 44, collapsed at a Congress Street fire in Troy and died at Samaritan Hospital. Officials said the cause of death was a heart attack.