

# Accident

## Investigators comb site of hayride crash

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About 72 people from eight scout troops of Brownies, Daisies and Junior Scouts, and their mothers, from St. Raphael the Archangel School at 6000 Jamieson Avenue in St. Louis, had boarded three wagons.

The girls ranged in age from 5 to 13. They attended kindergarten through eighth grade.

The wagon in which Rachel and Stephanie were riding was the last of three in a line that started down an incline when the tractor driver couldn't control the speed of descent.

The wagon careened down the wooded slope, crashing into trees and throwing off the victims.

An accident reconstruction crew spent most of the night and Saturday morning at the ranch, about 8 miles south of Interstate 44 on Little Antire Road.

The investigators were considering mechanical failure, an oversized load or operator error. They measured drag marks and impact points as well as the position of the victims who were thrown from the flat-bed, hay-filled wagon.

Tulgetski said he expected a report Monday or Tuesday. Meanwhile, Stephanie gathered with a hundred classmates, friends, priests, parishioners and crisis counselors at the St. Louis Hills parish for two hours Saturday afternoon. Girl Scout officials also were there.

Stephanie told her story outside the school. Also leaving the school was Mike Ruggieri. He was carrying his daughter, Josie, 5, who received a broken wrist in the accident.

Ruggieri has more to worry about. His wife, Any, is a patient at St. Anthony's Medical Center with a broken back.

Ruggieri said his wife told him she was able to grab Josie before the girl fell off the wagon.

### "Feeling of remorse"

The Rev. Matt O'Toole said the 100 who attended Saturday's session had "a collective feeling of remorse" about the event. The theme of this school year is the family and sharing joy, he said.

Now the McManemy family is sharing a deep loss "and as a family we are all sharing in that loss," O'Toole said.

As O'Toole talked to a reporter, classmates hugged each other and cried together.

## Rocking J Ranch



Rachel's aunt, Debbie Woodland, said her niece was "very well-liked. She loved her mom and dad very much. There was never a day when you didn't see a smile on her face."

At the Rocking J Ranch, photographers were barred from the property Saturday morning where bonfires from the night before still smoldered.

The ranch was closed Saturday and was likely to be closed Sunday as well.

Don Johnson and his wife, Susie, have operated the 78-acre ranch more than 12 years. The ranch has about 50 horses. It buys and sells horses, gives riding lessons and sponsors riding camps as well as providing hayrides and parties in the spring and fall.

The ranch also rents what is called the Party Barn, a 100-by-200-foot barn that the ranch's Web site calls a "boot-stompin' and hat-tossin' space."

Red and blue lights from emergency vehicles lit up the Antire valley Friday night as more than a dozen ambulances, fire rescue crews and paramedics struggled to reach the girls on a wooded hillside above the ranch. Antire Road winds through a heavily wooded area of High Ridge from Highway 30 to Twin Rivers Road in rural Eureka. Ambulance drivers unfamiliar with the winding unit road were forced to proceed slowly until they reached one of the main highways.

### "We train for this"

Unable to drive their vehicles to the accident site, ambulance and rescue personnel were forced to hike in with stretchers as they searched the hillside with flash-

lights looking for the injured. "This is a situation that police and fire departments dread happening," said Steve Davis, chief of the High Ridge Fire District. "But we train for this, and when it happens, we have a plan."

Davis said rescuers found the injured girls and adults throughout a large wooded area.

Ranch owner Don Johnson looked haunted Saturday as he helped back the ranch's three remaining hay wagons into a barn.

The wagon and the tractor involved in the accident have been impounded by the Jefferson County Sheriff's Department.

"It was just a freak accident," Johnson, 56, said. "We've been doing hayrides here for seven years, and we've never had a finger scratched."

Johnson had prided himself on the ranch's unique wagon trail, which winds up a wooded hillside above the stables and circles around to the other side of the ranch. He said he recut the trail this year to take some of the steepness out of the slope.

### "Just jumped out of gear"

The wagons carrying the Girl Scouts were coming back down the newly cut trail when the accident happened.

"The tractor just jumped out of gear," Johnson said. "It jumped out of first and went down the hill."

Johnson said the tractor's 21-year-old driver told him the brakes locked up as he was trying to gain control. With the heavily



ANDREW CUTRARO/POST-DISPATCH

Danielle Pogue, 12, (center) is comforted by friends after a service Saturday at St. Raphael the Archangel School at 6000 Jamieson Avenue in St. Louis. The service was held to mourn the death of Rachel McManemy, 12, who was killed in Friday night's hayride accident in Jefferson County, and to support the 11 children and nine adults who were injured.

loaded wagon pushing from behind, Johnson said, the tractor began skidding down the hillside.

"It only slid about 20 feet, and I guess it hit a couple trees. The wagon never even tipped over," he

said. Johnson said he trains the drivers himself and prohibits drinking on the job.

"We take a lot of pride in our drivers," Johnson said. "You al-

ways say, 'What could you have done to do this different?' We've had 10,000 people come through on hayrides and we've never had a complaint about not being safe, not ever."

## Accident victims

These are the victims of the hayride accident Friday night, as identified by the Jefferson County Sheriff's Department:

- KILLED**
- Rachel McManemy, 12
- INJURED**
- Cynthia Fiederoff, age unavailable
- Caroline Fischer, 4
- Kathleen Fischer, 35
- Rachael Grebing, 26
- Linda Hiette, 47
- Taylor Hiette, 6
- Jessica Imo, 13
- Juliett Knopp, 6
- Kathy Knopp, 37
- Danielle Magoc, age unavailable
- Jill Magoc, 35
- Karen Majda, 39
- Leslie Majda, 5
- Theresa Melton, 38
- Stephanie Melton, 13
- Brittany Oppland, 6
- Sandy Oppland, 37
- Margrette Riley, 6
- Amy Ruggieri, 32
- Josephine Ruggieri, 5
- Injuries ranged from severe to minor. All of the victims are from south St. Louis.

**Dangerous Trailers.Org & Dangerous Hayrides.Org The Forgotten Dead Number 3 And 22 Injured St. Louis Post Dispatch St. Louis Missouri 17 October 1999 Part Two**

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