

Slayings rock Furlow

Deputies following up 911 call find family dead

BY FRANK WOLFE
ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

FURLOW — A Lonoke County couple and their daughter were found dead after an apparent break-in at their home Friday night, police said.

A sheriff's deputy found the bodies of 46-year-old Joe Stocks, his wife, Barbara, 43, and their 18-year-old daughter, Heather, after a 911 caller from their home hung up at 10:40 p.m. Police tried to return the call, but no one answered, prompting a deputy to go to the

home to investigate.

Neighbors said the Stocks were pillars of the rural community and their deaths have left them shaken. Police called the deaths a triple murder but released few details Saturday.

"We don't exclude anything as a possibility," Arkansas State Police Lt. John Morrow said at an afternoon news conference at the Lonoke County Courthouse. "It's being investigated as a triple homicide at this time."

State police joined Lonoke

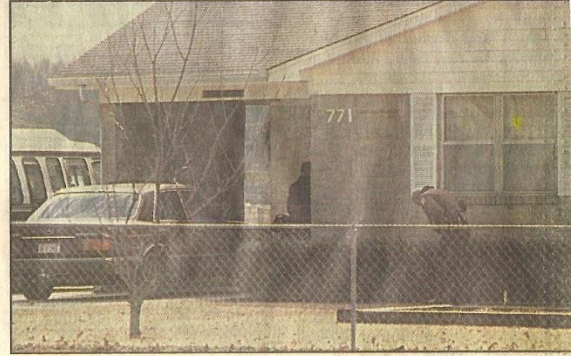
County sheriff's deputies in the investigation Saturday.

Morrow said police finished inspecting the crime scene Saturday but still have many people to interview.

Morrow declined to say how the family was killed but said robbery is a possible motive. Police found that the garage door had been forced open.

Morrow said authorities have no suspects.

Police were concerned about See **MURDERS**, Page 14A



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Lonoke County sheriff's deputies search for evidence Saturday outside the home of Joe, Barbara and Heather Stocks in Furlow. The family was found slain Friday night in their home after they returned from a basketball game.

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Murders

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the Stocks' 21-year-old son Heath, when they discovered his car was not in the driveway.

But police found him, and he is not a suspect, Morrow said.

The Stocks' small brick home at 771 Johnson Road is adjacent to a wheat field and a short drive from the Concord United Methodist Church, which the family attended.

Lonoke County Sheriff Charles Martin and several of his deputies searched alongside Johnson Road on Saturday afternoon, looking for anything that might have been taken from the home.

Joe Stocks was a self-employed trucker; his wife worked in the computer laboratory of Lonoke High School and for the Lonoke County 4-H Club.

Heather Stocks was captain of the Lonoke High School "Jackrabbits" cheerleading squad and was president of the Future Business Leaders of America regional chapter. She was known for her beauty and friends said she was outgoing and popular.

Mother and daughter had recently celebrated birthdays, Barbara Stocks on Jan. 4 and her daughter on Jan. 9.

Just before their deaths, the three had attended a Lonoke High School basketball game, friends said.

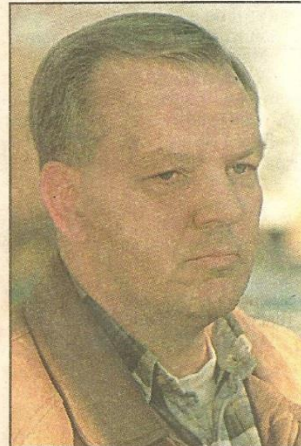


Heather Stocks

On Saturday afternoon, more than 300 people visited the small Concord United Methodist Church where Rev. Robert Marble, Lonoke High School Principal George Davis and other officials tried to help Heather Stocks' classmates cope with their grief.

Three Lonoke High School cheerleaders, wearing their purple cheerleader vests, stepped outside the church and wept.

"They were super people — salt of the earth. You couldn't find any better folks," said a woman outside the church who knew the couple.



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Lt. John Morrow of the Arkansas State Police says Saturday at a news conference that the slayings of the Stocks family "is being investigated as a triple homicide."

"They tried to do everything they could with their kids," said Jim DePriest, 43, a Furlow farmer who said he has known Joe Stocks since elementary school.

"Everybody out here knew them," he said.

Heather Stocks' close friends were gathered at one cheerleader's house Saturday afternoon.

Daniel Nellums, a friend of Heather Stocks and a junior at Lonoke High School, attended the basketball game Friday night.

"Heather was a real bright, smart person who had a promising future," he said.

Nellums said he talked to her almost every day at school.

Elwood Harris, Barbara Stocks' father, was awakened at 2 a.m. Saturday by a sheriff's deputy delivering the tragic news.

Harris had only one comment.

"Why did it happen?" he asked. "That's all. We just can't imagine anything like this happening."

A crowd gathered outside Furlow Grocery at 5 a.m. Saturday, waiting for the store to open. Owner Joe Bailey said people came in all day to buy food for the bereaved families.



Frank Sturdivant (left) of the Lonoke County sheriff's office joins deputies Saturday in a search of property around the home of Joe and Barbara Stocks. The Stocks'

small brick home at 771 Johnson Road is next to a wheat field. Deputies searched the sides of Johnson Road, looking for anything that might have been taken from the home

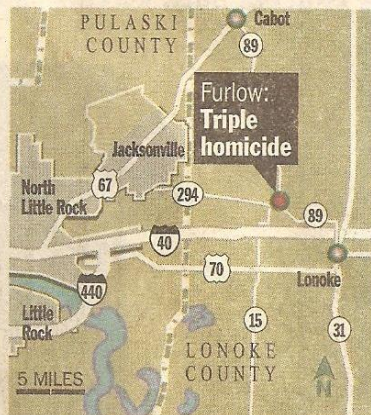
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"Everybody here in this community is either related to each other or friends with each other," Bailey said. "You don't even think something like this can happen out here. It's a wonderful place. Everybody is so close out here. Everybody's concerned."

"They were wonderful, wonderful people and everybody liked them," Bailey said. "They were in here all the time."

Neil Anderson, who said he attended high school with Joe Stocks, owns a fish farm in Lonoke, and said Stocks sometimes hauled fish for him.

"They were just great people," Anderson said. "It's about the most horrible thing that's ever



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happened here. I just hope they catch them. Everybody in this community is going to be afraid

until they do."

A man who visited Joe Stocks' parents' house, who asked not to be named, said he's known the family his entire life.

"It's just senseless," he said. "Everybody is in shock. Nobody knows what's going on."

Bailey said many of the people who passed through Furlow Grocery on Saturday shared the feeling of helplessness.

"About every person that comes in here asks about it," he said. "Everybody in the community, it's like one big family. And so everybody wants to help. They want to know what they can do to help. There's really nothing that you can do. Just pray for them."

Late Saturday afternoon Jackie Moore Jr., a member of the Concord United Methodist Church in Furlow who identified himself as a family spokesman, issued this statement: "The family would like to thank the press for their patience during the time of this unfortunate happening. We are putting this investigation into God's hands and into the hands of the Police Department. Any other information will be released by the Police Department as they see necessary."

Information for this article was contributed by Democrat-Gazette staff writers Kristen Everett and Mark Waller.

