

Jack E. "Eddie" Robinette and his wife, Barbara

2 KILLED IN HOUSE FIRE NORTH WEBSTER NEIGHBORS MOURN 'GENEROUS' COUPLE

Eddie Robinette and his wife, Barbara, were kind and generous, always there to help out or just provide companionship. That's how they will be remembered, friends and neighbors south of Webster Lake said Wednesday. Jack E. "Eddie" Robinette, 40, and his wife, Barbara, 45, died Wednesday when fire struck their North Webster home at 27 EMS W-27 Lane. When the fire department arrived shortly after 1:30 a.m., officers were told there might be people inside the house. But firefighters had to beat back flames for 45 minutes before they could enter the house. By then it was too late, North Webster Fire Chief Harold Gunkel said. "It was too late when we pulled up on the scene," he said. "There was no way we could get to them." Next-door neighbor Tibie Packer recalled seeing flames coming from a corner of the house. She threw on a jacket and ran next door to alert her sleeping neighbors, whose bedroom was in an opposite corner of the house. "I was banging on the wall. I yelled at them several times, but I didn't get any response. The smoke got so heavy I had to get back," said Packer, who with her husband, Worth, owns the house the Robinettes lived in. Based on what firefighters found, Gunkel said, it appeared the Robinettes had gotten out of bed, but were overcome. Their bodies were found in the bedroom. A dog and two cats also perished in the fire, Gunkel said. Fire investigators from the North Webster and Pierceton fire departments, along with the state fire marshal's office and the Kosciusko County Squad 70 Fire Investigation Team, are looking into the fire's cause. Investigators believe it started in the southwest portion of the house. Kosciusko County Sheriff C. Alan Rovenstine said it appears to have been caused by an electrical malfunction. Friends and neighbors grieved Wednesday. Worth Packer said he always could count on Eddie Robinette to help him if he needed to do some cleaning or lifting. A couple living down the road, Carol and Ken Weaver, said they got help from the Robinettes when they had their own tragedy. About a year ago, the Weavers' mobile home caught fire. It was gone in about five minutes, Carol Weaver said. Immediately after the fire, the Robinettes were there with several bags of clothing for their friends. "I wish there were more people like them," Ken Weaver said. "They didn't deserve it. It's just a shame they couldn't get out."

Contributed by Jane Edson