

TRUCK CRASH KILLS 5 DETROIT TEENS WERE CEDAR POINT-BOUND

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Author: JENNIFER DIXON AND SUZANNE SIEGEL Free Press Staff Writers Staff writers MOLLY ABRAHAM, JACQUELYNN BOYLE, JOHN CASTINE, MATT HELMS, ILAINA JONAS, RAJA MISHRA, LEKAN OGUNTOYINBO, JENNIFER JUAREZ ROBLES, BRIAN MURPHY, DENNIS NIEMIEC, KIM NORTH, AND ALISON YOUNG contributed to this report. It was written by JENNIFER DIXON.

A trip to Cedar Point ended in a deadly chain-reaction accident Tuesday, when an 18-wheeler slammed into a van carrying a group of **Detroit teens** being rewarded for trying to turn their lives around.

Four **teens** and one adult were killed when their van was flung into a soybean field east of Toledo on Route 2, 35 miles shy of the amusement park in Sandusky, Ohio. Nine others were taken to several hospitals.

The Ohio State Highway Patrol identified the dead as Andrea Hoston, 16; Latoya Casey, 15; Thomas Williams, 14; Dwight Walker, 14; and driver Ralph Richard, 37. All were from **Detroit** .

The injured were identified as Angel Baez, 17, Robert Reid, 14, Delniece Dent, 14, Danielle Richard, 10, and Quentin Richard, 12, all of **Detroit** .

Also injured were three Ohio residents traveling in a second van: Arnold Tary, 63, of Sylvania, Gary Nevers, 37, of Lambertville and John Bowen, 37, of Toledo. Also hurt was the driver of the 18-wheeler, George Croom, 59, of Cleveland.

The semitrailer **truck** , owned by a CC Midwest, a division of Central Transport of Warren, clipped a tanker **truck** that had stopped behind a car that was turning left. Authorities called that stretch of road one of the deadliest in the area. The **truck** , carrying auto parts, crossed the median, plowed into the teenagers' blue van and then struck a second van from Ohio.

Lt. Gabe Ferencz of the Ohio state police said he doubts that seat belts were worn by the Detroiters, but that he could not be certain.

The trip to Cedar Point was part of the Milestones program, run by Spectrum Human Services, a **Detroit** -area agency that allows young people referred by the juvenile court system to remain in their homes while they work to turn their lives around.

One of the dead, 14-year-old Williams, was straightening out his life, his aunt and legal guardian Etta Williams said. She said Williams was eager to attend Cooley High School in September.

"He was quiet, he loved his basketball and he was just starting to enjoy life. He was just starting to be content and happy," Williams said.

She said her nephew, with his eyes set on the Army after high school, planned to join the school's ROTC program.

"He was so excited about this trip. He was so excited about just starting over in life," she said.

The tragedy also devastated another **Detroit** family.

Not only was Richard, the driver of the van, among those killed, but his children -- son Quentin, 12, and daughter Danielle, 10 -- remained hospitalized Tuesday night.

One of the other dead children, Dwight Walker, was identified by the Associated Press as a relative of Richard.. The Richard children were not part of the Milestones program, but had gone along for the trip. Quentin was in critical condition at the Medical College of Ohio with internal injuries, including a ruptured spleen. Danielle was at Magruder Hospital with a broken arm.

The aunt of Richard's wife, Crystal, said her niece was "staying as strong as she can. She's taking each thing at stages. Wrong place, wrong time, and a lot of families will feel the repercussions."

Chinita Abby also said that Quentin Richard came out of surgery Tuesday night and faces additional surgery today.

Richard's van was the third in a four-van convoy that left **Detroit** early Tuesday from Spectrum's offices.

According to police, the deadly chain of events began when a tanker **truck** from Manfredi Motor Transit of Newbury, Ohio, carrying potassium hydroxide, a cleaning agent, stopped for a car that was turning left.

The semi was traveling behind the tanker. After sideswiping the tanker, the semi went out of control, veered into the oncoming traffic and hit the **Detroit** van nearly head-on.

The van plowed into a soybean field and the semi then hit a second van, which also landed in the field.

The passenger side of the **Detroit** van was sheared off, exposing overturned seats, sneakers and an unopened first-aid kit.

Ottawa County Sheriff Craig Emahiser said the scene was unbearable.

"Anytime you have five people killed and four of them are just children, it's going to be overwhelming. We're all parents here and when it's a child, it just hurts a little more."

Emahiser said the intersection is the most-dangerous one in Ottawa County, switching abruptly from four lanes to two.

He said there are plans to expand the road to include a left-turn lane, but construction will not begin until spring.

"We've had almost identical accidents, but they were without this incredible loss of life."

Mickey Blashfield, director of government and community affairs for CC Midwest, said the accident site was not normally part of the trucking company's route.

The **teens** in Spectrum's program are 14 to 17 years old. They are on intensive probation by the juvenile division of the Wayne County Probate Court, which refers them to Spectrum for counseling, mentoring and other help designed to keep them with their families.

Staff writers Molly Abraham, Jacquelyn Boyle, John Castine, Matt Helms, Ilaina Jonas, Raja Mishra, Lekan Oguntinyinbo, Jennifer Juarez Robles, Brian Murphy, Dennis Niemiec, Kim North, and Alison Young contributed to this report. It was written by Jennifer Dixon.

Caption: Photo DEBBY EDWARDS/Special to the Free Press Photo GABRIEL B. TAIT/
Detroit Free Press Photo PAULINE LUBENS/ Detroit Free Press Chart MARTHA THIERRY/
Detroit Free Press

Four people help move a man injured Tuesday in a multi-vehicle accident in Ohio's Ottawa County. Five people were killed when a **truck** hit a van from **Detroit** .

Brian Beaupre of Madison Motor Services surveys damage, in a field about 30 miles east of Toledo, Ohio. Behind him sits the van that was struck.

Home safe Tuesday evening, a teen who was among the Spectrum Human Services group headed to Ohio's Cedar Point hugs a relative. The two van loads of **teens** not involved in the **crash** returned to the agency's **Detroit** office to meet family.

(CUTLINE RAN IN METRO EDITION ONLY.)

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