SHAPIRO, GERALD

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SHAPIRO, GERALD B.
'JERRY', 54, of 75 Lauriston St., Providence, died February 1, 2008.

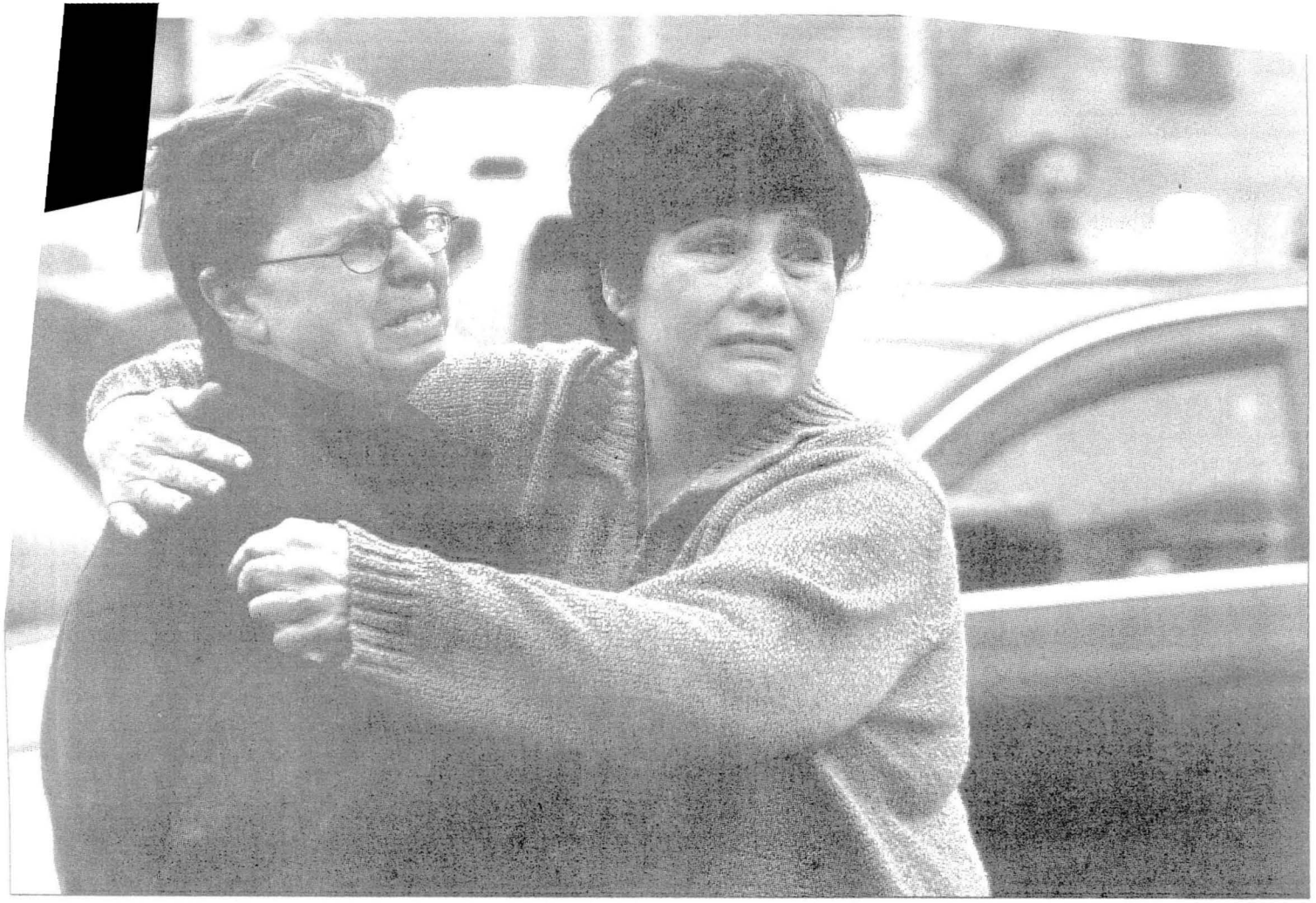
Born in Providence, a son of the late Shepley and Charlotte F. (Jacobson) Shapiro, he was a lifelong resident of the city.

Mr. Shapiro was a graduate of the University of Rhode Island, and for many years worked as a counselor for the RI Services for the Blind.

A member of Temple Emanu-El, he served on its Board of Directors and was an active participant in the Temple's Chorale Club.

He is survived by his brother Richard and sister-in-law Rhoda Shapiro of New York, and his nieces Sheryl and Elana.

The funeral service will be held TODAY, Sunday, February 3rd, at 12:00 Noon at Temple Emanu-El, with burial in Lincoln Park Cemetery, Warwick. In lieu of flowers, contributions may be made to Temple Emanu-El, 99 Taft Ave., Providence, RI 02906. Shiva will be observed at the home of Mr. & Mrs. Ronald Markoff, 99 President Ave., Providence, Sun 7-9 and Mon-Tues 2-4 and 7-9 PM. Arrangements by Sugarman-Sinai Memorial Chapel.



THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / **BILL MURPHY**

An unidentified woman, left, is comforted by Deborah Blazer at the scene of yesterday morning's fire.

Blind man perishes in fire

Gerald Shapiro, 54, had lived alone on Providence's East Side since his mother died 11 days ago.

BY GREGORY SMITH
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

PROVIDENCE — Gerald Shapiro, 54, a prominent member of Temple Emanu-El and a legally blind man who counseled the visually impaired as a state employee, died yesterday morning in a fire at his house on the East Side.

"It is a real tragedy and we are very saddened about this," said Gary Alexander, director of the Rhode Island Department of Human Services, where Shapiro was employed for 29 years as a vocational rehabilitation counselor.

Linda Rebello, a friend of his from Warwick, said, "He was the most loving uncle, brother, cousin and friend you ever would want to know."

Shapiro died from smoke inhalation as he tried to escape the fire, crumpling to the floor 7 to 10 feet from the front door of his house at 75 Lauriston St., according to Fire Chief George S. Farrell and the Rhode Island state medical examiner's office.

The fire apparently was electrical in origin, beginning near a ceiling light fixture on [illegible] Providence Fire Marshal Anthony DiGiulio.



Gerald Shapiro, 54, died of smoke inhalation in yesterday's fire at 75 Lauriston St., which apparently was electrical in origin, a Providence fire official said.

It was the second fatal fire in Rhode Island in two days; 42-year-old cancer patient James Marinelli died in a house fire in East Providence Thursday morning.

Yesterday, firefighters were alerted to the Providence fire at about 5:30 a.m. by a neighbor who knocked on the door of the fire station on Rochambeau Avenue, about three blocks from Shapiro's house, according to Farrell. A 911 call came in at about the same time, he said.

About 35 firefighters from a number of fire companies responded and found Shapiro's 2½-story Dutch colonial house filled with smoke. Shapiro was home alone. His 84-year-old mother, Charlotte, with whom he had lived, died only 11 days earlier. He was pronounced dead at 5:48 a.m.

Flames damaged several rooms on the first floor and a room on the second floor, there was smoke damage throughout and

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Fire

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water damage to the first floor and to several rooms on the second floor, DiGiulio said.

Somber relatives, some from Massachusetts, clustered in the parking lot of a store across the street in the late morning, watching firefighters and investigators coming in and out of the property. Among the cluster was Rebello, who had been Shapiro's mother's caregiver for five years and who recently had been coming to the house daily to help Shapiro get his meals and get back and forth to temple so he could offer mourning prayers for his mother.

Known as Jerry, Shapiro worked for the Office of Rehabilitation Services, in a unit called Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired, helping people find education, employment, transportation and other services. He got around with a collapsible cane.

"He was very dedicated to his work and to his clients," said Rabbi Alvan Kaunfer, of Temple Emanu-El. "He would travel around and visit clients in their homes and help them. He was a very giving and helpful person both in his private life and in his professional life."

He also volunteered, according to Rebello, for an association for the blind in Rhode Island.

Shapiro was an elected member of the Temple Emanu-El board of directors, which is a group of 50 to 60 people, and at his urging the president of the congregation recently had authorized the creation of a committee to see if the synagogue facilities could be made even more handicapped-accessible than they are.

He sometimes led religious services at the invitation of a cantor — "He would lead the chanting in Hebrew," Rabbi Kaunfer said — and he was a member of the Congregational Choral Club.

"He had the most beautiful singing voice that you ever heard," said Rebello. Added Roberta Rodman, of Canton, Mass., a Shapiro cousin, "He knew all the prayers by heart."

Shapiro's funeral service is scheduled for noon tomorrow at Temple Emanu-El.

Although public safety officials did not announce that Shapiro was the man who had died in the blaze, it was confirmed by family members, his rabbis and others.

In 29 hours Thursday and yesterday, two men died, two people were hospitalized and two firefighters suffered injuries in fires at five houses across the state.

The cause of the death of Marinelli, in the fire at 39 Peck Ave., East Providence, has not been determined, according to Andrea Bagnall Degos, spokeswoman for the medical examiner.

With a report from projo.com staff writer Brandie Jefferson

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2-22-08

Obituaries

Rhode Island loses a stellar voice

Gerald Shapiro, 54, died trying to escape from an electrical fire in his home

By Marylyn Graff
mgraff@jfri.org

IN THE EARLY morning hours of February first, a tragic fire deprived Rhode Island of a stellar citizen and a voice raised both on behalf of the sight impaired and in song for Temple Emanu-El.

Gerald Shapiro, 54 years old, died, probably from smoke inhalation, just a few feet from his front door as he tried to escape the electrical fire that severely damaged his home. In sad irony, he had a to-do list with a reminder to call an electrician.

Shapiro was living alone since the death of his mother a short 10 days before, and was still in mourning. His brother and sister-in-law had to make a sorrowful return trip from New York to Rhode Island for another funeral.

Shapiro, called Jerry by everyone who knew him, worked for the State of Rhode Island in the Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired unit of the Office of Rehabilitation. Services. He was a college graduate and held a graduate degree in counseling, said Rabbi Alvan Kaunfer of Temple Emanu-El. He had been legally blind for most of his life. However, he didn't let that handicap him as he and his collapsible cane were familiar sights walking around his East Side neighborhood greeting people, especially the youngsters. He was friendly and talkative with a great sense of humor. He accepted his loss of sight with grace and went on from there.



SOMETIMES, CANTOR MAYER from Temple Emanu-El would have Jerry Shapiro conduct the prayer service, which he did entirely from memory.

He was deeply dedicated to his work with the blind, even traveling through the state to visit clients in their homes to assist them in obtaining services, said Rabbi Kaunfer. He also volunteered for Insight (formerly the R.I. Association for the Blind.)

Linda Rebello, who had been Shapiro's mother's caregiver and was helping him with meals, and getting to the temple to say the traditional prayers of mourning, said, "He was the most loving uncle, brother, cousin and friend you would ever want to know."

Rick Reamer of WRNI and his wife sat in front of Jerry Shapiro at Saturday morning Shabbat sevices, which he attended regularly. They became friends over the years and Reamer spoke movingly on his program about his personal loss. Cantor Brian Mayer of Temple Emanu-El spoke about Shapiro's special flair for *davening*, his amazing mastery of the entire prayer service, even knowing when to turn the pages, although he couldn't see them, chanting in his fine baritone. Sometimes Cantor Mayer would have Shapiro conduct the service, which he did entirely from memory.

An elected member of the temple board, Shapiro urged the creation of a committee to increase the handicapped accessibility of the building, which bore fruit in being recently authorized by the president of the congregation.

Jerry Shapiro, a person who gave everything to life, left a legacy of goodness, said those who knew him, and an ideal to those who didn't.