

Kentucky Post - June 13, 1989

Ohio train wreck kills councilman and wife

By Crystal Harden
Kentucky Post staff reporter

The Park Hills couple who died Monday in a collision at an Ohio railroad crossing were devoted community servants, friends and family members say.

Ralph R. "Bob" Kaelin, 63, was a city councilman, former fire chief and past president of the Park Hills Civic Organization.

Mary Jean Kaelin, 62, was chairman of the civic organization's annual fund drive and an officer in the altar society at St. Agnes Church in Ft. Wright.

"He was a good councilman. He always had the city at heart," Park Hills Mayor L. F. "Skip" Fangman said.

The Kaelins owned Bob & Harry's Service Garage at 9019 Princeton-Glendale Road in Union Township, Ohio. They ap-



Mary Jean and "Bob" Kaelin

parently were on the way home when the collision occurred because a city council meeting was scheduled Monday night, said James Kaelin, the couple's oldest son.

A Norfolk Southern train struck the center of the Kaelins' car on the driver's side as they attempted to cross railroad tracks on Rialto Road in Union Township. Kaelin either did not heed a warning sign or did not see the train because of vehicles parked along the track, witnesses said.

The Butler County coroner's staff declared the Kaelins dead at the scene of the accident, which occurred at 4:57 p.m.

Park Hills Councilman Thomas Sorrell, Kaelin's brother-in-law, informed the council shortly before the meeting at 7 p.m. The council began the meeting with a moment of silence, and city officials lowered flags in front of the city building to half-staff.

Park Hills officials said Kaelin brought a businessman's

A Norfolk Southern train

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Train

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sense to the council.

He was adamant about enforcing zoning laws and spearheaded a committee that looked into the city's insurance costs as a way to try to save money.

"He had a common-sense approach," Osterhage said.

Said Councilman William Sommerkamp: "He was a stickler for a point and usually made a lot of sense. He will be sorely missed."

The Kaelins had lived on Rosemont Avenue in Park Hills since the 1950s. Kaelin had served on the Park Hills council since 1986, when he was selected to fill the vacancy of George Neumann.

He also was a member of the Park Hills Volunteer Fire Department for about 30 years and retired in December 1985, having served at least six years as fire chief, said Councilman John J. Osterhage.

The couple belonged to St. Agnes Church in Ft. Wright. Mrs. Kaelin, whose maiden name was Mary Overwein, was a lector there as well as an officer in the altar society. She had also been active in Notre Dame Academy's alumnae association.

"I just don't know what to say," Mrs. Kaelin's sister, Ruth Sorrell, said this morning. "I can't believe she's gone. She was

my best friend."

The Kaelins had nine children: James Kaelin of Park Hills; Tim Kaelin of Edgewood; Paul Kaelin and Mark Kaelin, both of Park Hills; Connie Roencker of Anderson Township, Ohio; Patty Davis of Jamestown, Colo.; Karen Kaelin, Judy Kaelin and Peggy Schilling, all of Park Hills.

Kaelin bought the garage business about 10 years ago, James Kaelin said. Mrs. Kaelin started working with him there about four years ago. James and his brother Tim also work in the family business.

Three witnesses told Union Township police they heard the train's warning whistle as it approached the crossing where the Kaelins were hit, a police clerk said this morning.

Two of those witnesses apparently were in line behind the Kaelins to cross the tracks. Another witness was eating supper at home, the clerk, Reva Cook, said.

Trucks were in the area and workmen, apparently had been working alongside the tracks. However, it was not clear if trucks might have blocked the Kaelin's view of the train.



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Jean Overwein Kaelin, 62, of Park Hills, died Monday in an automobile accident. She was a secretary and receptionist at her husband's business, Bob and Harry's Garage, in Port Union, Ohio. She was a member of St. Agnes Altar Society and Notre Dame Academy Alumni Association and was active with St. Agnes Church.

Survivors include daughters, Connie Roenker of Cincinnati, Patti Davis of Jamestown, Colo., Karen Kaelin and Judy Kaelin, both at home, and Peggy Schilling of Park Hills; sons, Jim Kaelin and Paul Kaelin, both of Park Hills, Tim Kaelin of Edgewood and Mark Kaelin, at home; a sister, Ruth Sorrell of Park Hills; and nine grandchildren.

Mass of Christian burial will be at 10 a.m. Friday at St. Agnes Church, Ft. Wright. Visitation will be from 5 to 9 p.m. Thursday at Linnemann Funeral Home, Covington. Burial will be in St. Mary's Cemetery, Ft. Mitchell. Memorials are suggested to the Ruth Lyons Children's Christmas Fund.