

GEOFFREY D. SORIANO
PROSECUTOR



TIMOTHY M. FITZGERALD
CHIEF OF DETECTIVES

THOMAS J. CHIRICHELLA, JR.
FIRST ASSISTANT PROSECUTOR

STEVEN O. UGHETTA
DEPUTY CHIEF OF DETECTIVES

SOMERSET COUNTY PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE

40 NORTH BRIDGE STREET

P. O. BOX 3000

SOMERVILLE, NEW JERSEY 08876-1262

TELEPHONE: 908-575-3300

FAX: 908-704-0750

WWW.SCPO.NET

MARCH 27, 2015

NEWS RELEASE

RESULTS OF SHERIDAN INVESTIGATION RELEASED

SOMERVILLE, N.J. – Somerset County Prosecutor Geoffrey D. Soriano, Somerset County Chief of County Detectives Timothy M. Fitzgerald and Montgomery Township Police Captain/Director Robert E. Palmer announce the conclusion of the investigation of the deaths of John Sheridan and Joyce Sheridan of 49 Meadow Run Drive, in the Skillman Section of Montgomery Township, New Jersey.

Prosecutor Soriano states that a very lengthy and comprehensive investigation has culminated with the issuance, yesterday, of the Final Report of the Northern Regional Medical Examiner Office. The Assistant Medical Examiner has determined that John Sheridan's cause of death is sharp force injuries and smoke inhalation, and the manner of his death is suicide. Those determinations are consistent with the evidence developed during the investigation which supports the conclusion that John Sheridan killed Joyce Sheridan and, thereafter, committed suicide.

On Sunday, September 28, 2014 at approximately 6:13 a.m., a 9-1-1 call was placed to Somerset County Communications reporting a house fire at the residence of John Sheridan and Joyce Sheridan. Upon receipt of the aforementioned 9-1-1 call, Montgomery Township Police were dispatched to the residence and arrived at same within four minutes of the call. Also providing an initial response to the scene were firefighters from Montgomery Township, Hillsborough Township, and Rocky Hill Borough. Rescue squads from Montgomery Township, Hillsborough Township and Princeton as well as the Mobile Intensive Care Unit from Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital were among the first units to arrive on scene. Upon arrival, the first responding police officers entered the home, but they were unable to ascend the main staircase to access the second floor due to a heavy smoke condition which permeated same. First responders shouted to anyone who may have been inside the home, and they received no response. They searched the first floor and basement of the home and found

no one on those floors. Through their initial observations, first responders determined that the fire was localized in a second floor bedroom which was located at the top of the main staircase and was later identified as the master bedroom.

Equipped with self-contained breathing apparatuses, firefighters then ascended the staircase and entered the smoke-filled master bedroom. Despite an overwhelming lack of visibility in that bedroom, they were ultimately able to locate John Sheridan. John Sheridan was found lying on the floor face up, at the foot of the bed with the top portion of a two piece, armoire dresser resting on his body. After the fire was extinguished, the entire armoire was found to be badly damaged, and the lower, supporting portion was severely charred and essentially destroyed. Firefighters removed the body of John Sheridan from the residence. Firefighters thereafter continued their search and located Joyce Sheridan, who was also found lying face up on the floor to the left of the bed, and she was removed from the residence. Shortly thereafter, both individuals were pronounced dead.

Autopsies were performed on John Sheridan and Joyce Sheridan at the Northern Regional Medical Examiner Office on September 29, 2014, and September 30, 2014, respectively. The results of the post-mortem examination of Joyce Sheridan revealed that she suffered eight wounds to her head. Five of those wounds were incised wounds. Three of the wounds were stab wounds. She also suffered from a stab wound to her chest that perforated her aorta. In addition, Joyce Sheridan had three incised wounds to her hands that the Assistant Medical Examiner characterized as defensive in nature. She sustained bruising to the back of her left hand and to her right shoulder. Her cause of death was determined to be a stab wound to the chest which perforated her aorta, and the manner of death has been classified as a homicide. The autopsy further revealed that Joyce Sheridan was dead before the fire started. A toxicological analysis for Joyce Sheridan revealed the presence of prescribed medication.

The results of the post-mortem examination of John Sheridan revealed that he had five wounds to his torso and neck area. Two of the wounds were incised wounds. Three of the wounds were stab wounds. All five wounds have been characterized by the Assistant Medical Examiner as superficial in nature, consistent with self-infliction. However, one wound to the neck caused a small perforation to the right jugular vein and would be fatal without medical treatment. There were no defensive wounds noted on John Sheridan's body. The Assistant Medical Examiner found that John Sheridan suffered five broken ribs—2 on the left side and 3 on the right side--which were consistent with an armoire falling on him. The elevated level of carbon monoxide in his blood and the presence of soot in his larynx, trachea and bronchial tree indicated that John Sheridan was alive after the fire was started. John Sheridan's cause of death was found to be sharp force injuries and smoke inhalation, and the manner of death has been

classified as a suicide. A toxicological analysis for John Sheridan revealed the presence of prescribed medication and carbon monoxide.

Pursuant to the execution of multiple search warrants, an examination of the entire Sheridan residence revealed that the crime scene was confined to the second floor master bedroom. The fire in that room was started by the use of an accelerant, namely, gasoline. A half empty gas can was found in the bedroom. Subsequent investigation revealed that the gas can in question belonged to the Sheridan family and had been stored in the garage area of the residence. Testing by the New Jersey State Police Office of Forensic Sciences revealed that John Sheridan's DNA was located on the handle of the gas can in question. A pour pattern of gasoline in the master bedroom was observed around the bed on the floor. A flattened box containing wooden matches and individual wooden matches were located on the floor of the master bedroom near the area where John Sheridan was reported by first responders to have been located. The same type of wooden matches was also found in the first floor living room near the fireplace.

Detectives recovered a large carving-type knife from the bed in the master bedroom. The Assistant Medical Examiner determined that the wounds to Joyce Sheridan—most notably, the chest wound--were consistent with having been caused by that knife. DNA testing revealed that Joyce Sheridan's blood was on that knife. A small amount of male DNA was recovered from the handle of the knife, and analyses revealed that John Sheridan could not be excluded as a possible contributor. A large serrated bread knife was also recovered on the bed. While none of the stab wounds to either party can be attributed to that knife, DNA consistent with that of John Sheridan was recovered on the handle and on the blade of the serrated knife. Both knives were found to be from knife sets located in the kitchen of the Sheridan residence.

An article of John Sheridan's clothing, specifically his underpants, which he was wearing at the time that his body was removed from the house, was submitted to the New Jersey State Police Office of Forensic Sciences Laboratory for examination. Initial testing revealed the presence of blood on that article of clothing. Further analysis revealed that the bloodstain identified on this piece of clothing was a mixed DNA sample and that neither John Sheridan nor Joyce Sheridan could be excluded as possible contributors. Clippings and scrapings were taken from Joyce Sheridan's fingernails and examined for DNA. DNA testing indicated the presence of male DNA, and John Sheridan could not be excluded as a possible contributor

In the master bedroom, detectives located six folds of cash totaling \$950.00, John Sheridan's wallet, wristwatch and cell phone, all undisturbed, on a night stand. Also located on the floor of the master bedroom was Joyce Sheridan's iPad. When Joyce Sheridan's body was recovered, two of her rings remained on the ring finger of her left hand, one ring was on her right ring finger, earrings remained on her ears, and she was

wearing a necklace. Other items of value such as additional amounts of currency, jewelry, computers, electronics, and antiques were found throughout the home and were undisturbed. There was no evidence indicating that any area of the residence was disturbed by anyone other than first responders. There was blood outside of the master bedroom on the staircase and the wall that abuts the staircase. Aside from that blood and blood in the master bedroom, there was no blood in any other area of the home. The aforementioned blood was observed to be deposited on top of the soot and on swipe marks in the soot, and, thus, the blood transfers in these areas were caused by the extrication of John Sheridan and Joyce Sheridan from the residence by the firefighters.

A variety of items such as door knobs and handles were examined with various lighting techniques to determine whether further processing was warranted. It was determined by the experts of the Crime Scene Investigation Unit that fingerprints would not be revealed by dusting, and nothing of further evidentiary value was observed on those items.

The investigation further revealed that there were no signs of forced entry into the home except for one door forced open by firefighters. Detectives learned, through interviews of potential witnesses, that the Sheridans routinely left the doors to their home unlocked. First responders found that three doors at the rear of the residence as well as the main front door of the home were unlocked. An additional door in the front of the residence between the living quarters and the garage was the only door found to be locked; this was the aforementioned door which was forced open by firefighters. All windows were closed and intact, with no evidence of an attempted forced entry. Items located beneath a number of windows inside the home appeared undisturbed. The only windows that were damaged were those on the second floor that were broken by firefighters for ventilation during their fire suppression efforts. Police canvassed the neighborhood and received no reports of any unidentified person or vehicle in the immediate area of the home that night or that morning.

Various vehicles located at the scene were searched pursuant to search warrants. These searches revealed no evidence pertinent to the fire or to the deaths of John Sheridan and Joyce Sheridan.

On Saturday October 4, 2014, a second autopsy was performed on John Sheridan by Dr. Michael Baden in the presence of the Assistant Medical Examiner. Dr. Baden also reviewed the findings of the autopsy of Joyce Sheridan. Dr. Baden, a former medical examiner, was retained as a consultant by the Sheridan family. Immediately after this autopsy and review, the Somerset County Prosecutor's Office was notified that both doctors opined that neither of the two knives that were recovered from the master bedroom caused any of the stab wounds sustained by John Sheridan.

Detectives returned to the Sheridan residence on Sunday, October 5, 2014, for the purpose of further searching for a knife or other implement that may have caused the wounds to John Sheridan. No additional knives were located in the master bedroom. A piece of resolidified metal, which had apparently melted during the course of the fire, was recovered. During the original search by crime scene detectives on September 28th, the metal piece was found and photographed embedded in the hardwood floor in close proximity to where the body of John Sheridan was reported by first responders to be located. The metal was submitted to the New Jersey State Police Office of Forensic Sciences Laboratory for analysis, and further analyses were performed by a private materials testing laboratory. The metal was two inches wide by six and one-half inches long with a mass of approximately 132.5 grams. The composition of this metal piece was identified as predominantly zinc with very small percentages of aluminum and copper. Although the properties of the metal were identified, its original shape and purpose could not be identified.

During the course of this investigation, representatives of the Somerset County Prosecutor's Office and the Northern Regional Medical Examiner Office spoke on more than one occasion with Dr. Baden. The opinions and comments expressed by Dr. Baden were taken into consideration. Dr. Baden was also invited to discuss the case in its entirety with Prosecutor's Office personnel and representatives of the Medical Examiner Office prior to the formulation of any final determinations.

Through interviews with all four sons of John Sheridan and Joyce Sheridan, detectives were able to learn where each of them was located on September 27, 2014 and during the early morning hours of September 28, 2014. Detectives analyzed cellular telephone records and cellular tower records for the four sons' cellular telephones. The analysis of that cellular activity revealed that none of the sons' telephones was used in the area of the Sheridan residence during that relevant time period. Further, their cellular telephone activity demonstrated that their phones were used in other areas during said relevant time period--consistent with the statements of all four sons.

Throughout this investigation, Detectives from the Somerset County Prosecutor's Office and the Montgomery Township Police Department conducted over 180 interviews of potential witnesses. Among others, these individuals included family members, friends and neighbors of John Sheridan and Joyce Sheridan, co-workers and close colleagues, as well as persons identified by the Sheridan family. Various records, including cellular telephone records, cellular tower records, computer generated and stored information, medical records, financial records, and miscellaneous documents found in the home were obtained and reviewed by investigators and members of the New Jersey Regional Computer Forensic Laboratory. There was no definitive link to the proximate cause of these deaths found in any of those records.

Information was obtained from family members and colleagues regarding John Sheridan's demeanor in the days leading up to September 28, 2014. Among other things, he was described as presenting himself as "out of character", "very upset", "withdrawn", and with "an attitude of resignation". The predominant source of his preoccupation appears to have been work related. John Sheridan was scheduled to meet with a group of his co-workers on the afternoon of Sunday, September 28, 2014. With regard to work related issues, family members and colleagues characterized John Sheridan as "disproportionately concerned", "genuinely worried" and "overly worried". To many, the level of concern which John Sheridan was exhibiting was categorized as unwarranted. To those closest to John Sheridan and Joyce Sheridan, it was apparent that Joyce Sheridan was worried and upset because she, too, recognized that John Sheridan was exhibiting levels of apprehension atypical to his usual calm and deliberative demeanor. Based upon accounts of his behavior during the time period immediately preceding September 28, 2014, it is evident that John Sheridan was acting materially differently than his norm.

This intensive investigation involved a number of law enforcement agencies, numerous interviews, a variety of forensic analyses and examinations which took time to consider, prioritize and evaluate. Many possible scenarios and theories were considered. The evidence in this case supports the conclusion that John Sheridan fatally stabbed Joyce Sheridan, set the fire, and committed suicide. This conclusion rests upon, among other things and most notably:

- The qualitative difference between the wounds sustained by Joyce Sheridan versus John Sheridan. That is, the nature and number of the wounds sustained by Joyce Sheridan were extensive and included defensive wounds on her hands. Juxtaposed to her wounds, there was an absence of defensive wounds found on John Sheridan. In addition, the superficial nature of the wounds sustained by him has been found by the Assistant Medical Examiner to be consistent with self-infliction.
- The fact that the instrumentalities recovered from the scene, most significantly, the knives, the accelerant, and the matches all belonged to the Sheridans and were located in the residence.
- The fact that the crime scene was confined to the master bedroom.
- The quantity and variety of items of value that remained in or at the Sheridan residence, including jewelry, currency, computers, electronics, antiques, and motor vehicles.
- The investigation has revealed no evidence indicating that the home was forcibly entered or disturbed by an intruder.

- The absence of any evidence of an unidentified third party leaving the Sheridan residence or departing the neighborhood on the morning in question.
- The uncharacteristic demeanor exhibited by John Sheridan during the days leading up to September 28, 2014 as observed by and described by family members and colleagues.
- The DNA findings relating to John Sheridan with regard to Joyce Sheridan's nail clippings and scrapings, the gas can, and the two knives recovered.
- The DNA findings relating to John Sheridan and Joyce Sheridan found in the blood stain on John Sheridan's clothing.