



Horses Kill 1 and Injure 23 at Iowa Parade

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By Anahad O'Connor

A Fourth of July parade in eastern Iowa turned to mayhem on Sunday when a pair of runaway horses lunged into the crowd and trampled 24 people, many of them children. At least one person was killed, and several others were seriously injured.

The chaos took place when two horses pulling a buggy got spooked and charged into the crowd at the Heritage Day Parade, a decades-old tradition that attracts thousands to Bellevue, a town of 2,300 people nestled along the Mississippi River. Bellevue's fire chief, Chris Roling, said the two horses, both at the rear of the parade, bumped into one another, knocking one horse's bridle off and causing it to bolt, followed by the second horse.

"They took off down the street uncontrollably," Chief Roling said in a telephone interview. "They went about six blocks — the horses and the carriages behind them, running over children and adults along the parade route."

"I've been doing this 35 years and I've never seen anything like it," he added.

A spokesman for the Bellevue Police department said Janet Steines, 60, of Springbrook, whose husband was driving the carriage, died Sunday evening at the University of Iowa Hospital in Iowa City after she was taken there with injuries from the accident.

About 10,000 people were lined up along the parade route when the horses made their dash just after 11 a.m. As the runaway horses galloped through the crowd, a passenger on the buggy was thrown into the air. Parents grabbed their children and ran, and throngs of parade-goers screamed and scrambled for cover.

The horses charged ahead for more than a quarter mile until a man at the front of the parade on a haybine — an antique farm machine used to gather hay — tried to stop them.

"He turned around and saw the horses coming toward him and he pulled his unit in front of the horses to slow them down," Chief Roling said. "After running into his unit, they ran into a road sign and then there was a van that got hit. They ran into the side of the van and finally there were enough bystanders there to help out."

In addition to the woman who died, another 23 people were injured, all but two of whom were taken to local hospitals by ambulance. Among the injured were at least four people in critical condition — including at least two children — and another five with "major injuries," like broken bones, collapsed lungs and head injuries, Chief Roling said.

Bellevue has only two ambulances, but a dozen additional ambulances rushed to the town, some from as far as 26 miles away. About 70 emergency responders arrived as well, and a doctor and several nurses and paramedics who happened to be in the crowd watching the parade pitched in.

Chief Roling said this was the first time he could recall any sort of chaos like this at the parade. As for next year's event, he said there was no way he could think of avoiding another mishap of this nature.

"This is just something that happens that we can't prevent," he said. "It wouldn't be any different from an accelerator sticking on a car and running through the crowd."