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# CITY & STATE

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## Families of four slain girls move on - but do not forget



Barbara and Skip Suraci stand before a wall decorated with pictures of their daughters, Sarah and Jennifer Harrison, who were killed in 1991.

By PAMELA WARD  
Austin-American-Statesman Staff

The holiday warmth on the front door shimmered in the sunshine last week, a remnant of the Christmas season. This warmth — one that Skip and Barbara Suraci were in no hurry to reverse — flowed while dawn painted ribbons and a message that says: "We Will Not Forget."

**Those girls are the last thing I think about at night before I go to sleep, and they're the first thing that's on my mind in the morning.**

—Skip Suraci, stepfather of 2 victims

months since they were awarded a \$12 million lawsuit settlement from the owners of the yogurt shop and shopping center. The parents have quit jobs, moved to new houses, returned to school, and created and provided over a dozen foundations in their daughters' names. Still, there is one constant: keeping company with the pain that comes from losing a child to violent death, and knowing the killers remain free.

a home in Scofield Farms, a new North Austin subdivision. It's a stately brick house with high ceilings, leaded glass doors and a fireplace. Over the mantel hangs a large portrait of the girls. Murty bookshelves and other walls are tastefully arranged with pictures of the girls at various ages. The home's formal decor is a departure from the child-oriented house they left behind.

"It was horrible that sooner or later we were going to move out of that house," Skip Suraci said. "It was the girls' house. The whole top floor of the house was their space."



Sunlight filters through the heavy smoke Saturday afternoon as firefighters try to extinguish a house fire at 801 Rocky River Road in West Lake Hills. The blaze destroyed the 60-year-old home, which was bought by the family in 1962 and moved there from the site of the LBJ Library.

## Fire destroys West Lake Hills home

■ 60-year-old two-story house consumed in blaze that burned for 5½ hours

By CONNOR GUANASSO  
Austin-American-Statesman Staff

As firefighters worked to put out hot spots, the owner of a house perched atop a hill in West Lake Hills watched and remembered the wedding and dinner parties she had hosted in the 60-year-old home. Mary Lou Fortis, 76, had lived in the white, neoclassic frame house for 30 years. Saturday it was destroyed by a fire that burned for 5½ hours.

Neighbors and reporters gathered around Fortis, whose eyes filled with tears as she started to recount the history of the house. "This is terrible. My house is burning, and I'm telling a story," Fortis said, while sitting outside in her neighbor's lawn chair with a borrowed blanket draped around her, drinking coffee. "But it's the house's story, and it needs to be told."



Homeowner Mary Lou Fortis, seated, is comforted by neighbor Doris Cranshaw while firefighters try to control the blaze.

## Execution was just, sister says

■ Woman claims she has lost nine years of her life for something she didn't do

Associated Press

DALLAS — The sister of a man whose execution last week sparked an international outcry says her brother really did commit the murder, even though he claimed she was the one who pulled the trigger.

life. I've had nine years of suffering for something I didn't do," she said. "I wasn't put to death, but he still robbed me of all these years of my life, my happiness."

## Poland's sons, daughters carved a niche in Texas

Something was pulling me back to Panna Maria. But for the longest time I didn't pay attention to this burst of my boyhood. Several times last summer, and on November 1, I passed on U.S. 181, without noticing anything of America's first Polish colony. I could see to the east the spire of the Gothic St. Joseph's Church along FM 81 that holds the village in its diurnal grandeur.

prize. Father Bernard Goebel, as close as neighbors and yet so far apart in their beginnings. Mary being a native of the village and Goebel a son of Poland. To my mind they served as bary symbols of Polish Catholicism in Europe, as well as holding out against fascist and communist odds in Europe, as well as holding out against hard and child-stealing material secularism in America.

## Texas Tech study questions value of back support belts

By DOC STARKLEY  
Austin-American-Statesman Staff

to have helped him avoid back injuries for the three years he has used it. But a new study by physical therapists at Texas Tech University's Health Science Center in Lubbock says the belts are useless for workers whose employers don't provide the entry training. The researchers concluded that the belts might even be harmful if they give a worker a false sense of security.

H.H. Merrifield, chairman of the health science center's physical therapy department, said the three-month study of 65 maintenance and loading dock workers at two Lubbock area hospitals found that the belts could not prevent back injuries in 10 of the workers.

Merrifield added, "There's little scientific evidence in favor of them," he said. "Companies have jumped on them because of the tremendous load of workers' compensation cases they have. They are groping for something that works. But before they have a conditioning program to strengthen their workers' trunk muscles and teach proper lifting techniques."

## Camp Mabry picnic to recognize Pickle

Austin-American-Statesman Staff

There will be a touch of the Fourth of July in January when the Founder Lions Club of Austin holds a free welcome-home picnic for former U.S. Rep. Jake Pickle. D.Austin, and his wife this week.