



David Normand | The Livingston Parish News  
Funeral procession

**The Spirit of Louisiana fire engine rolls down Hatchell Lane toward Florida Boulevard carrying the body of Rhett Jeansonne to Greenoaks Memorial Cemetery in Baton Rouge Monday morning. The procession followed a funeral service at Immaculate Conception Catholic Church Monday for the slain Insurance Department investigator. Also on the engine are Jeansonne's FPD 5 firefighting helmet, boots and coat. Jeansonne and Kim Sledge, both state insurance fraud investigators and Denham Springs residents, were shot and killed June 7 in Ville Platte**

DENHAM SPRINGS - Flags all over Louisiana flew at half-staff to honor two Denham Springs residents murdered June 7 while performing their duties as fraud investigators with the Louisiana Department of Insurance.

The Spirit of Louisiana, the famed fire truck built in Holden and donated to New York City following the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attack, bore the casket of Rhett Jeansonne, a longtime volunteer firefighter for District 5.

On the day of their deaths, Kimberly Sledge, 44, and Jeansonne, 39, traveled to Cajun country to meet with two insurance customers who had complaints about their agent, John M. Lavergne. The fraud investigators then went to Lavergne's office in downtown Ville Platte to get the files, said Insurance Commissioner Jim Donelon.

Department of Insurance officials did not know if Lavergne was expecting them, but the 67-year old insurance agent shot the investigators at his office.

Lavergne also shot and killed himself later that day, his office surrounded by law enforcement officers.

The death of Sledge and Jeansonne impacted not only their families, but also their colleagues and hundreds of Livingston Parish residents. All wanted to show their respect and love for good friends and good citizens who were taken in a sudden burst of senseless violence.

Kimberly McElveen Sledge was buried at Greenoaks Memorial Park Saturday. She leaves behind a husband, a daughter, a stepdaughter, a stepson and other relatives.

Jeansonne leaves behind a wife, a daughter, three sons, an infant granddaughter and other relatives.

State Sen. Dale Erdey said the fraud investigators were in harm's way, the same as men and women in uniform, and their families should have the same benefits.

Erdey added language to SB 229 which would qualify the Jeansonne and Sledge families for death benefits like those paid to families of law enforcement officers and firefighters killed in the line of duty.

SB 229, which is not yet law, would authorize a payments of \$250,000 to the surviving husband and wife and \$25,000 to children.

On Monday, the Spirit of Louisiana fire truck carried Jeansonne's body from Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in Denham Springs to Greenoaks Memorial Park in Baton Rouge.

Jeansonne had been a volunteer fireman for 22 years. He worked with both Districts 4 and 5, and earned the rank of captain with Fire Protection District 5.

He was a nationally registered Emergency Medical Technician Basic and an American Heart CPR Certified Instructor.

Jeansonne's firefighter's hat, jacket and boots rode down Florida Blvd. on the back of the Spirit of Louisiana. The 42,000-pound pumper truck was built at Ferrara Fire Apparatus in Holden with donations after Sept. 11, 2001. It was donated to New York City, which lost 35 fire trucks on 9/11.

Then in 2005, after Hurricane Katrina, New York sent the pumper home, leading a convoy of trucks.

Jeansonne had been an insurance fraud investigator since November 2006, Donelon said.

Sledge, an 11 year employee of LDI, began her career in 2000 in the Health Division and later became an investigator with the Fraud Section, Donelon said.

"She's remembered as a true country girl, who loved the outdoors and caring for her animals," Donelon said.

"Our deepest sympathies go out to the loved ones of our two departed colleagues, in particular, the surviving spouses and children of these brave individuals," Donelon said.

June 7, 2011 "was the darkest day in the history of the Department of Insurance," Donelon said.

In speaking with the families of the slain investigators, Donelon said that he "made a commitment that this will never happen again."

Donelon said the Department of Insurance is now considering arming its investigators.

Co-workers would like to have a permanent memorial on the grounds of the Department of Insurance.

Donations can be mailed to the Jeansonne/Sledge Memorial Fund at LA Capitol Federal Credit Union, 700 Main St., Baton Rouge 70802.