



City of Arts & Innovation

# PRESS RELEASE

**Police Department**  
**LARRY V. GONZALEZ**  
**Chief of Police**

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 27, 2022

### CONTACT:

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## THREE HOMICIDE VICTIMS FOUND AFTER HOUSE FIRE

RIVERSIDE, CA – On Friday, November 25, 2022 at approximately 11:08 a.m., Riverside Police Officers were dispatched to check the welfare of a young female who appeared distressed while getting into a Red Kia Soul with a man along the 11200 block of Price Court, located in the La Sierra South neighborhood of Riverside. While officers were responding, our Public Safety Communications Center began receiving calls of a structure fire just a few houses away from where the check the welfare call originated.

The Riverside Fire Department arrived first and reported a working fire on the first floor of the residence. They initiated a fire attack, made entry, then discovered three adult victims laying on the ground in the front entry way. Their bodies were pulled outside where it was determined they were victims of an apparent homicide. Firefighters continued their efforts until the fire was placed under control and eventually extinguished.

Detectives with the Robbery – Homicide Unit, along with Specialists from the Forensics Unit, responded and assumed the investigation. They have been assisted by the Riverside County Sheriff-Coroner's Office, the Riverside County District Attorney's Office, and Arson Investigators with the Riverside Fire Department.

The victims have been identified as 69-year-old Mark Winek, his wife 65-year-old Sharie Winek, and their daughter 38-year-old Brooke Winek. The exact cause and manner of



their deaths are still pending. The cause of the house fire continues to be under investigation although it appears at this point to have been intentionally ignited.



During the preliminary investigation, it was determined the young female described in the initial check the welfare call was a teenager who lived where the house fire and homicides occurred. The man she accompanied was eventually identified as 28-year-old Austin Lee Edwards of North Chesterfield, Virginia.

Information was relayed to allied law enforcement agencies regarding this triple homicide and Edwards' vehicle description while detectives sought warrants for his arrest and attempted to determine his current whereabouts. Several hours later, he was discovered driving with the teen through San Bernardino County when he was located by the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department in the unincorporated area of Kelso. Edwards fired gunshots at deputies and a deputy-involved shooting occurred where he was subsequently pronounced deceased at the scene.

The teen was unharmed and later placed into protective custody of the Riverside County Department of Public Social Services.

Detectives determined Edwards had met the female teenager through the common form of online deception known as "catfishing," where someone pretends to be a different person than they actually are. It is believed Edwards had developed an online relationship with the teen and obtained her personal information. He travelled from Virginia to Riverside where he parked his vehicle in a neighbor's driveway and walked to the teen's home. At some point, he murdered the teen's grandfather, grandmother, and mother before walking back to his vehicle with the teen and leaving. Detectives learned Edwards had worked for the Virginia State Police until recently employed at the Washington County Sheriff's Office in the state of Virginia.

"Our hearts go out to the Winek family and their loved ones during this time of tremendous grief, as this is a tragedy for all Riversiders," stated Riverside Police Chief Larry Gonzalez. "This is yet another horrific reminder of the predators existing online who prey on our children. If you've already had a conversation with your kids on how to be safe online and on social media, have it again. If not, start it now to better protect them."

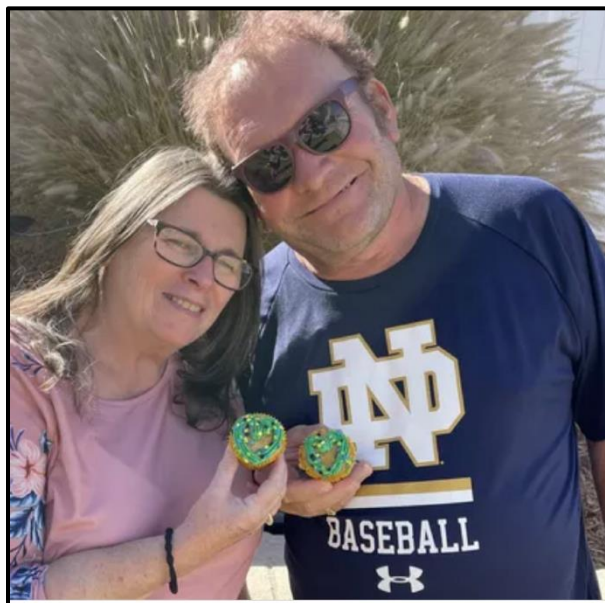
This investigation is still ongoing and there are no other details to release at this time. Anyone with additional and relevant information should contact Detective Josh Ontko at (951) 353-7135 or [JOntko@RiversideCA.gov](mailto:JOntko@RiversideCA.gov), or Detective Bryan Galbreath at (951) 353-7105 or [BGalbreath@RiversideCA.gov](mailto:BGalbreath@RiversideCA.gov).

Those wishing to remain anonymous can email [RPDTips@RiversideCA.gov](mailto:RPDTips@RiversideCA.gov), or download and use the Riverside Police Department's "Atlas 1" mobile app by utilizing the "Send a Message" feature. Our app can be downloaded at:

- **iOS Atlas 1 App:** <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/atlas-1/id1509528933>
- **Android Atlas 1 App:** <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=app.atlasone>

The Riverside Police Department is an active member of the Riverside County Child Exploitation Team (RCCET), a task force comprised of local, state and federal law enforcement officials led by the Riverside County District Attorney's Office. RCCET is dedicated to proactively monitoring and tracking registered sex offenders to ensure their compliance with registration requirements, and to protect our children through community education and the identification, apprehension and prosecution of those who criminally exploit our children. To report suspected online sexual exploitation of children, go to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children's Cyber Tip Line at [www.cybertipline.org](http://www.cybertipline.org)

For additional information and resources on how to better protect your children from online predators, visit the Million Kids organization at [www.millionkids.org](http://www.millionkids.org). Million Kids is dedicated to preventing sex trafficking, child pornography and sextortion through education, and they provide intervention assistance services to families who may have a loved one that is a victim of sexual exploitation.



**Sharie & Mark Winek**



**Brooke Winek**