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**GREENSBORO**

## Wreck claims 3 members of family

9-12-03

By **AMY WOLFFORD**, Staff Writer  
News & Record

GREENSBORO -- The limousine was a surprise.

Tara Howell Parker -- wife of NASCAR driver Dale Jarrett's crew chief -- sometimes shared the perks of the flashy race world with her younger sisters. So on Wednesday, she rented the stretch limo to escort the sisters to and from the Fleetwood Mac concert the three had been anticipating at the Greensboro Coliseum, family said.

But as they headed west on Interstate 40 about 11:30 p.m. after the concert, construction and heavy traffic brought their limousine to a stop near the Vanstory Street overpass. That's when a 1998 Ford F-150 pickup -- which Greensboro police say was driven by a drunken driver - - slammed into the back of the 1998 Lincoln, rupturing the gas tank and sparking a fiery explosion that killed all three sisters.

There was Parker, a 29-year-old former Miss Winston, who two years ago received a heart transplant. Parker, was married to Shawn Parker, crew chief for NASCAR's No. 88 car. Two months ago, the couple, who lived in Cornelius, adopted a son, Jagger, and recently purchased a motor coach so they could stay together at the race track as a family.



Megan Elizabeth Howell (left), Tara Howell Parker (center) and Mysti Howell Poplin enjoyed doing things together, a family member says. (Special to the @News & Record)

Her stepsister, Mysti Howell Poplin, 24, of Mocksville, was a new mother herself, raising 8-month-old daughter Mallie, with husband,

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Shane, while working as a paralegal, said her mother-in-law, Carla Poplin of Mocksville.

The youngest was half-sister Megan Elizabeth Howell, 16, of Mocksville. At Davie High School, where Howell was a junior, principal Larry Bridgewater said Howell was a popular student who served as president of the school's photography club and had once been a cheerleader.

Though their busy schedules often kept them apart, the three loved to spend time in each other's company, said Carla Poplin, Mysti Poplin's mother-in-law. "They did a lot of stuff together when they could," she said. "They were excited to go and be together."

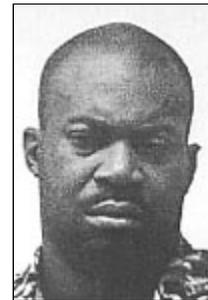
A candlelight vigil Thursday night drew about 150 students to Howell's assigned parking space, No. 210, at Davie High. There, boyfriend Jonathan Britt said the Fleetwood Mac concert was to be the first big night on the town for the three sisters, now that the 16-year-old was mature enough to go out with her older siblings.

"She was talking about it for weeks," Britt said.

And Betty Howell, grandmother to Tara Parker and Megan Howell, reminded students to think about her lost loved ones every time they got behind a wheel. "It was for something senseless that these three lives were snatched up," she said.

Police charged the driver of the pickup, Jeffrey Niles McFayden, 35, of 4107 Chateau Drive in Greensboro, with three counts of second-degree murder and one count of driving while intoxicated. He is being held on \$800,000 bond in the Guilford County jail. Records show his blood alcohol level was .17 percent, more than twice the state's legal limit of .08 percent.

This is not the first time McFayden has been charged with drunken driving. He pleaded guilty to driving while impaired in 1999 and received a 60-day suspended sentence, according to Guilford County District Court records. McFayden, a TIMCO interior aircraft mechanic, faced similar charges in July 1993 and March 1999, but those charges were dismissed.



McFayden

McFayden's son, James McFayden, said it was common for his father to go to a friend's house or various bars to have a few beers after work, but James McFayden still finds it hard to believe his father was involved in Wednesday night's accident.

"It's hurtful. That's my father," he said. "He really didn't mean to kill anybody like that."

The limo driver, James Canady, 42, of New Ellenton, S.C., was able to escape the burning car, and was treated at Moses Cone Hospital for

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broken ribs and released, police said. Two people in a 1997 Ford Escort -- who became involved in the wreck after the truck pushed the limo into it -- were not injured.

Steven Coleman of Greensboro had just left the concert himself when he saw flames shoot as high as the overpass nearby. He said it was amazing anyone got out of the limo or truck alive.

"The fire was so intense I thought no one could survive," he said. "It was such a fireball you couldn't distinguish one car from the other."

Penny Copen, a Jarrett spokeswoman, said that plans are being made to replace Parker as crew chief for Sunday's New Hampshire 300 in Loudon, N.H.

Arrangements for the sisters at Eaton Funeral Service in Mocksville are incomplete.

The Associated Press and staff writers Russ Rizzo, Michael Fuchs and Dustin Long contributed to this report.

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