



# LAKELAND FIRE DEPARTMENT

## Media Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: Monday, January 25, 2016

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### Update on Structure Fire at Bella Vista Manor that Resulted in 1 Fatality, 3 Injured

Lakeland, FL – The Lakeland Fire Department (LFD) responded to an early morning structure fire at Bella Vista Manor on Sunday, January 25, 2016. The structure fire resulted in one fatality, and three patients being transported to Lakeland Regional Health by Polk County EMS services. Two patients were transported at the scene upon emergency responders' arrival. The third patient was taken approximately an hour afterwards after complaining of possible smoke inhalation. The patients' conditions are unknown to LFD at this time

The decedent has tentatively been identified as John W. Connelly, age 59. The autopsy for Connelly is scheduled for Monday, January 25, 2016 in the afternoon. Due to the extent of the burns of the decedent, the autopsy will provide confirmation of his identify.

Lakeland Fire Department Investigators have determined that the cause of the fire was Smoking. The fire began in the bedroom of Unit 409, where the decedent lived. Investigators have also determined that a neighbor in Unit 408 pulled the fire alarm, which began the evacuation of the other 41 residents and alerted emergency responders.

Bella Vista Manor is an Independent Living Facility, not an Assisted Living Facility as reported by some news outlets. Bella Vista Manor was constructed in 1971, which was prior to Florida Fire Code requiring multi-family dwellings like it to be sprinkled. However, LFD Fire Inspectors noted that the facility was designed to and had construction features that limited fire spread; like concrete construction and fire rated corridors and doors. Bella Vista Manor does not have any history of fire code violations with the Lakeland Fire Department.

It is important to note that due to the location of the fire on the fourth floor, the intensity of the fire, the fact that most of the residents are older adults who are more susceptible to fire death, and the early morning hours of when the structure fire happened the incident had the potential to be disastrous. However, due to the quick and plentiful response by the Lakeland Fire Department and the Lakeland Police Department an even worse event was averted. Firefighters were on scene within four minutes, both firefighters and police officers evacuated residents, and the Firefighters were aggressive in attacking the fire to contain it as quickly as they did.

Images provided by a bystander are attached and available at [www.facebook.com/LakelandFD](http://www.facebook.com/LakelandFD).

The original media release with intial information is available at <http://www.lakelandgov.net/lfd/media/media-releases> .

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