

Fatal Christmas fire claims life of 83-year-old Brighton man

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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BRIGHTON - Firefighters from the **Brighton Betsy Ann Fire Protection District** made a gruesome discovery on the early hours of Christmas morning.

Brighton Betsy Ann Fire Protection District Chief Jason Bowman said firefighters were dispatched to the residence of 83-year-old **Thomas Vernatti** after receiving a call for a detached garage on fire around 1:54 a.m. on Christmas.

Officers from the **Macoupin County Sheriff's Office** and **Brighton Police Department** were already on the scene when firefighters arrived, Bowman said. Firefighters battled the blaze, which had fully involved the detached garage, and police searched the residence for Vernatti. Bowman said firefighters found Vernatti deceased as they attempted to suppress the flames.

"Police were looking for the owner, but he could not be located inside the residence," Bowman said. "When we made an attack on the fire, we found the owner deceased inside the structure."

The cause of the fire is under investigation at this time by both the Macoupin County Sheriff's Office and the **Illinois State Fire Marshal**. Bowman said the fire is not considered suspicious at this time.

"We're not sure what caused it at this time," Bowman said. "But, it is not being ruled suspicious at this time."

Mutual aid was provided by the **Fosterburg Fire Protection District**.