

[https://pressofatlanticcity.com/3-trump-exec-2-pilots-die-as-helicopter-crashes-in-parkway-median/article\\_4071dbca-24e3-11e4-8835-0019bb2963f4.html](https://pressofatlanticcity.com/3-trump-exec-2-pilots-die-as-helicopter-crashes-in-parkway-median/article_4071dbca-24e3-11e4-8835-0019bb2963f4.html)

## 3 Trump execs, 2 pilots die as helicopter crashes in Parkway median

By DEBBIE BORJA Staff Writer

Oct 10, 1989



Donald Trump, top left, leaves the Etes home in Margate after senior executive Mark G. Etes, 37, died in a helicopter crash on Oct. 10, 1989.

The Press of Atlantic City

By DEBBIE BORJA Staff Writer

**(P**ublished Wednesday, October 11, 1989)

**LACEY TOWNSHIP** -- Three of Donald Trump's top casino executives were killed when their helicopter plummeted into a wooded median of the Garden State Parkway in Ocean County Tuesday afternoon.

Stephen F. Hyde, 43, who bore responsibility for Trump's three Atlantic City casino properties, Taj Mahal top executive Mark G. Etes, 38, and Jonathan Benanav, 33, executive vice president of Trump Plaza Hotel and Casino, were killed along with the craft's two pilots.

"I'm sick, just sick; it's unbelievable," repeated Trump several times, his voice

cracking with emotion during an interview Tuesday.

"When I first heard about it, I prayed it wasn't true ... then I found out what happened. I can't find the words," Trump said, his voice trailing off.

---

## People are also reading...

- 1 **Holy Spirit coach, teacher John Bewley remembered as a 'true Spartan'**
- 2 **Cumberland County Prosecutor's Office sergeant killed during Bridgeton home invasion**
- 3 **4 arrested in Hamilton Township armed robbery**
- 4 **Atlantic City's Ducktown project 'for the neighborhood, by the neighborhood'**

---

"These were three fabulous young men in the prime of their lives. No better human beings ever existed," Trump said in a statement issued by the Trump Plaza. "We are deeply saddened by this devastating tragedy. Our hearts go out to the families."

Hyde's quiet ways pulled together many of Trump's Atlantic City deals. While Trump is brash and egotistical, Hyde was humane and humble, and known as the detail man who kept the casinos working.

Etes was recognized as Trump's point man for special sporting events and known as the man behind Trump's reputation as master of the super deals of sports and entertainment.

Benanav joined the Trump organization in 1986, coming from the Philadelphia Airport Hilton, where he was general manager. From June 1982 to July 1985, he was director of hotel operations and executive assistant manager for the Sands Hotel & Casino in Atlantic City.

Trump flew from New York and visited at least one of the executive's

families in their Atlantic County home Tuesday night.

The pilot was tentatively identified as Capt. Robert Kent, of Ronkonkoma, N.Y., according to State Police Capt. Thomas Gallagher. He said the co-pilot was Lawrence Diener of Westbury, N.Y.

Witnesses said the helicopter began spinning uncontrollably when its rotor apparently became detached from the body of the craft and crashed to the ground about 1:40 p.m. at Garden State Parkway milepost 71.5, about two miles north of the Barnegat toll plaza.

The Italian-made Agusta A 109A was bound for Atlantic City from the East 60th Street heliport in Manhattan, authorities said.

Police confirmed three bodies were found in the wooded area surrounding the helicopter within 10 feet of the aircraft and two were inside it when investigators arrived.

The helicopter rotor was found about a quarter of a mile north of the main body, police said.

"The main body was in one piece but the various sections are broken apart," said State Police Lt. John Neeld, operations officer with the Garden State Parkway.

Authorities said they did not know what caused the helicopter to crash.

"I heard the helicopter fly by. I turned to look because it was awfully loud and I heard a big bang and the rotor separated from the body of the helicopter," said Tom Murray, an eyewitness to the 1:40 p.m. crash.

"The rotor fell off and they just fell to the ground. It fell straight to the ground," Murray said. The 38-year-old Rhode Island resident said he was camping in a wooded area here about two miles west of the crash site.

"(I felt) a little bit of terror, horror, as I watched," he said.

Others heard the crash

Several employees at the Oyster Creek Nuclear Generating Station who were working outside around 1:45 p.m. about three-quarters of a mile from the crash site saw an explosion in the air and debris falling from the sky, company spokesman Karl Neddenien said.

He said Oyster Creek officials contacted the State Police.

"We heard the crash. It sounded like an explosion," said Vince Cannella, a Garden State Parkway employee who was working at the nearby Oyster Creek Rest Area.

Cannella said he was the first person on the scene, arriving just before the State Police. "I saw three bodies ... right where the cockpit was," he said.

More than two hours after the crash, state troopers began removing the five bodies from the woods. Rescue workers aided in extricating some of the bodies.

"We have no idea as to the cause," State Police Superintendent Col. Clinton L. Pagano said shortly after he arrived at the scene at about 4 p.m.

The flight was a charter service originating in northern New Jersey and destined for Atlantic City, Pagano said.

The Trump Organization chartered the aircraft from Paramount Aviation, which operates helicopter service between New York, northern New Jersey and Atlantic City, aviation officials said.

The Trump executives had been in New York for a news conference announcing the Feb. 3 World Boxing Organization bout between junior

welterweights Hector Camacho and Vinny Paziienza at Trump Plaza.

Paramount executives would not respond to calls to their office in Lincoln Park, Morris County. A spokeswoman said the company would issue a public statement after more details became available from authorities.

The downed aircraft was not affiliated with the Trump Air helicopter service that shuttles passengers between Bader Field in Atlantic City and the West 30th Street heliport in Manhattan.

Investigators at site

Officials with the Trump Organization, as well as the National Transportation Safety Board and the Federal Aviation Administration, were on the site late Tuesday afternoon, Pagano said.

"Given this roadway, it could have been a lot worse," Pagano said, pointing out that the helicopter fell in the median and not along the roadway itself. "Five fatalities are bad enough."

Authorities kept the media away from the crash site, which appeared to be about 20 to 30 feet in from the Parkway's northbound lanes. Pagano said debris was scattered about "a very small area."

Traffic northbound on the Parkway was stopped several times while State Police helicopters landed in the roadway. Otherwise, one lane remained open throughout the afternoon, even immediately following the crash.

But traffic moved slowly as motorists alarmed by the many emergency vehicles and police and media helicopters overhead tried to discover what had occurred.

Initially authorities received reports that there had been a mid-air collision and they searched for a second aircraft for a short time until Murray arrived

at the scene and told police what he had seen, Neeld said.

Emergency crews from various local and state agencies were on hand. They included the Waretown Volunteer Fire Company, the Forked River Volunteer Fire Company, the Lacey Township First Aid Squad, and the state Forest Fire Service.

Parkway crews were expected to work through the night clearing trees from the area. And state and federal investigators are to be back at the scene today.

The National Transportation Safety Board is the lead agency investigating the accident and will determine the probable cause of the crash. A representative of the Agusta company was expected to arrive today to assist in the investigation, said NTSB officials in New York.

*(Press staff writers Elaine Finn, Carol Jertson, Sonny Schwartz and Donald Wittkowski contributed to this report.)*