

Death of couple in crash brings grief to students at Smith School

By Michele Linck
Journal staff writer

Three Federal Aviation Administration investigators were on the site Monday where a private airplane crashed Sunday, killing a Sioux City couple.

The single-engine Cessna was piloted by Melvin Beccard, who died along with his wife, Stacy Beccard, when the plane went down about 11 a.m. half a mile east of Martin Field in South Sioux City.

The investigation team from Lincoln was headed by Larry Beecher.

Stacy Beccard was one of two fifth-grade teachers at Sioux City's Smith Elementary School, where students and staff were struggling Monday to deal with their loss.

A staff meeting was held before school Monday to put procedures in place, said Leon Koster, principal.

"It's quite a shock," he said. "We haven't had time to look at it rationally; we're still dealing with the emotionality of it."

Numerous counselors from other schools and the Area Education Agency were on hand to help students deal with the teacher's death. No memorial service at the school had been planned Monday, but Koster said one might be held later.

He said counselors would tell parents to encourage their children to attend the funeral if they expressed an interest in doing that.



Melvin and Stacy Beccard

"These students are ages 10 and 11 and that's a credible thing to do," Koster said.

"Many expressed frustration — 'We didn't get to say good-bye,'" Koster said. A memorial service might help with that need for closure, he said.

"With 50 kids in the fifth-grade, you're seeing a whole host of experience (with death). They're all over the chart in terms of emotional maturity and how they express their grief."

Koster said a substitute teacher would finish out the remaining 11 days of the school year. This had been Stacy Beccard's second year

teaching at Smith.

Melvin Beccard was employed at Nutra-Flo Equipment Co. The person who answered the phone Monday said they were upset but said the company was not commenting on the loss.

Beccard had made one aborted attempt to land the plane in Sunday's high winds and was turning for a second try when the crash occurred, according to observers at the airport. A low-level, downwind turn might have been responsible for the accident, said Gene Martin, owner of the airport, who witnessed the crash.

Martin said it had been "many, many years" since there was a fatality among air traffic using the field. He said years ago a glider pilot crashed and died after her plane stalled and spun into the ground.

"But we've never had anything like this," he said.

The Beccards were returning from a breakfast fly-in at Cherokee, Iowa.

Autopsies were performed Monday at the request of the FAA, according to Dr. Gene Herbek, Woodbury County deputy medical examiner. Both died of extensive traumatic injuries, he said. In addition, tissue and other samples were sent to the FAA laboratory in Oklahoma City.

"So, they're investigating it thoroughly," Herbek said.

Obituaries for the couple are on page B9.