

# Questions of why prevail after four die in crash

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**FRANKLIN, Va. -**

A small town devastated by a weekend crash that killed a Boy Scout leader and three Scouts tried to pull together Monday as investigators tried to determine why their vehicle ran off the road.

The SUV crashed at noon Sunday as John Oliver, 43, drove four scouts back from a camping trip. The vehicle failed to negotiate a turn and hit a tree along Route 35 near in Sebrell.

Killed with Oliver were Luke Drewry, 12, and Carter Stephenson, 14, both of Franklin, and Jackson Fox, 13, of Capron.

Oliver's son, Michael-John Oliver, climbed out of a window before fire consumed the vehicle. He was taken to Sentara Norfolk General Hospital and was expected to survive, police said.

In the town of 8,600 people, questions and grief abound.

"Folks I have talked to, they've known all these boys, all these young men," the Rev. Susan Reeves, pastor at High Street United [Methodist](#) Church, said Monday.

On Sunday night, some church youth groups gathered to talk about the crash.

"Some ... are really asking tough questions," said the Rev. Sharon James, minister of education for Franklin [Baptist](#) Church. "Things like, 'Why do things like this happen? These were all good people. Why do terrible things happen to good people?'"

Gaynelle Riddick, Stephenson's great-aunt, said she will remember her great-nephew as a boy with a passion for Scouting, church activities, golfing hunting and fishing.

"Without your faith," she said, "I don't think you can handle this."

Riddick was among many visitors who stopped at the Stephenson home.

"The whole town is just devastated," she said.

Oliver and Fox attended Southampton Academy, where Headmaster Craig Jones said counselors were made available Monday.

"When you have just over 30 students in a grade level, they're very close," Jones said. "Students are heartbroken, but they are very comfortable speaking to each other and staff members they know. We're going to close ranks and take care of this."

The Scouts were trailing another carload of Scouts who attended the same camping trip, part of the 19th Annual [Virginia](#) United Methodist Scouting Fellowship in Blackstone.

The vehicle was within 10 miles of Franklin when it crashed.

Police say Oliver didn't appear to be speeding, and there's no indication that he had a medical

problem that would have contributed to the crash. The two-lane road is not considered particularly dangerous, and all the passengers were wearing seat belts.

A report from the medical examiner is not expected for several days.

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