

THE BUFFALO NEWS



Onlookers at Goodrich Road and Maple Street in Clarence Center stay behind police lines near Flight 3407 crash site.
Derek Gee/Buffalo News

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Airline, after seeking 'permission' from kin, releases 35 of 49 names

By Anne Neville
NEWS STAFF REPORTER

Almost 68 hours after the crash of Continental Connection Flight 3407 on Thursday night in Clarence, the airline and its public relations firm finally released a partial manifest listing the names of all the people aboard the doomed plane.

In all, the names of 35 of the 49 passengers and crew aboard the plane were released.

"Out of respect for the privacy of and concern for the families affected by the accident of Flight 3407, Colgan Air has contacted each family to request permission to disclose the names of their loved ones. The families of the following passengers have agreed to allow Colgan to release the information. Some passengers will not be publicly identified by the airline in accordance with the wishes of their families," said the Web site of Colgan Air, the subcontractor that runs Continental Airlines commuter flights.

Hill & Knowlton, an international communications consulting firm with headquarters in Manhattan, is handling public relations for Colgan Air. Two officials of Hill & Knowlton did not return phone calls Sunday.

The Buffalo News already had independently identified 40 of the 50 people who died, mostly through information provided by their families and friends.

One expert, who lost her fiance on TWA Flight 800 off Long Island in 1996, said she understands why officials took nearly three days to release the partial manifest.

"It's important that all the family members receive the information personally and directly before it's released to the public," said Heidi Snow, who founded AirCRAFT Casualty Emotional Support Services after her fiance died.

"Through the years, family members have found it very hurtful when a death is confirmed in the press before it is told directly to them by the airline," Snow said. "In other air disasters, it's been done, and families tend to get very upset.

"I recognize the urgency for the community to know, as well, but it's something that people do not take well, when the public is told before the family members are contacted directly. I think [airline officials] are doing everything they can to not do that this time, because they have learned over time that it doesn't work out well."

Her organization uses volunteer grief mentors who have lost loved ones in air crashes to talk with others who have suffered similar losses. They can be reached at (877) 227-6435 or at accesshelp.org.

aneville@buffnews.com