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By EARL WATT

• Leader & Times

A house fire that completely destroyed a mobile home near the Oklahoma state line on Highway 83 Wednesday afternoon has claimed the life of Curtis Phillips while Lori Phillips clings to life at the Via Christi Burn Center in Wichita.

Curtis Phillips, 58, sustained third degree burns on 66 percent of his body and suffered severe burns to his lungs.

Phillips was being maintained on life support Thursday until medical staff informed his brother Larry Phillips and sister Joy Beasley that recovery was not possible.

Phillips was removed from life support and died within the hour.

He had no children.

Phillips dies from house fire injuries

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“When I saw Curtis sitting on the back of a truck while his house was on fire, I thought he would make it,” Larry Phillips said. “But once they got him there and removed the damaged skin and scoped his lungs, it was too late.”

Larry Phillips, the managing editor of the Leader & Times, responded to a scanner call to cover a fire at the state line not knowing the house was that of his brother.

He arrived to see the house engulfed in flames but his brother and common law wife outside. The couple had been removed by onlookers minutes before the entire house was consumed in flames.

The couple was transported to Southwest Medical Center and later flown to the Wichita burn center.

“We were positive that night,” Larry Phillips said. “They were trying everything they could, keeping his blood pressure up, his heart beating. He was on a ventilator — on life support.”

But the next morning, after doctors had a chance to evaluate the severity, the decision was made that the injuries were too severe for recovery.

“Several doctors came in and social workers, told us that recovery was not possible,” Phillips said.

As immediate family, Phillips and Beasley had to make the decision.

“Naturally, it was heartbreaking,” Phillips said “In this business, I have heard about it from friends and strangers, but it is an ordeal when it is your decision to make. We decided to shut down everything except pain medication. Within the hour, he died.”

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Lori Phillips showed better signs for a possible recovery. She only had second degree burns on 9.5 percent of her body, and the damage to her lungs was not as severe.

“She had inhalation and tissue damage,” Larry Phillips said. “They were able to use a saline solution and flush some of the debris out. She is a part of the family, and we are praying for her.”

Curtis Phillips was transported back to Liberal for an autopsy. He was then cremated. A funeral service time has yet to be determined.

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