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## 3 dead in Arc bus crash in Jasper

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by Rachel Davis

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A single-vehicle accident claimed the lives of three local men Friday morning.

At approximately 8:15 a.m. on Friday, a bus owned by The Arc of Walker County was traveling down Ridgewood Road in Jasper when it left the road and struck a tree. A driver, who was an employee of The Arc, and three male passengers were on board the bus when it crashed.

Raymond Austin, 57, of Jasper, was pronounced dead on the scene. Phillip McGuff, 45, of Parrish, died after being transported to Walker Baptist Medical Center. Thomas Jones, 56, was airlifted to UAB Hospital, where he was pronounced dead at approximately 3:30 p.m. on Friday.

All three men were clients of The Arc of Walker County. According to its Facebook page, The Arc of Walker County is “a nonprofit agency providing services to children & adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities.”

The driver of The Arc vehicle, Crystal Pigg, 35, of Double Springs, was injured in the crash. She was transported to UAB by ambulance, where she was treated and released late Friday night, according to UAB Patient Information.

Walker County Coroner J.C. Poe said the bodies of the three men are being sent to the Alabama Department of Forensic Science in Montgomery for autopsies.

The Jasper Police Department is investigating the wreck with the help of the Alabama Department of Public Safety’s Traffic Homicide Division, as is common with traffic-related deaths. There was no known cause for the wreck as of press time.

“Our department will investigate this accident as we do all fatality accidents,” Jasper Police Chief Connie Rowe said. “We are very fortunate to have the availability of traffic homicide investigators from the Department of Public Safety to offer their expertise.”

Rowe said the department would conduct a full investigation, but with three dead and another injured, she cautioned that there may not be fast answers to the questions that remain.

“The work that must be done is multiplied by the number of victims,” Rowe said. “This will take some time as it is time consuming and meticulous work.”

The first call to 911 about the wreck came from a witness on the scene at 8:15 a.m. Jasper Police Officer Joe Herron arrived on scene at 8:18 a.m., Officer Kevin Williams arrived two minutes later and Jasper Fire and Rescue arrived three minutes after that. Regional Paramedical Services arrived on scene shortly after that.

“I’ve been on a lot of fatality accident scenes,” Rowe said. “They are all sad, but this one was particularly touching. Bless them and all the Jasper Fire Department first responders who extracted them and worked on them at the scene. I was impressed by the efforts of RPS and Air Evac.”

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