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UPDATE: Pilot killed as plane crashes in Lake Twp.

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LAKE TWP.: A single-prop, private airplane crashed next to a vacant house on Charolais Street Northwest Friday evening, exploding into flames and killing the pilot.

Michael Connell, 45, of Bath Township, was alone in the plane, according to State Highway Patrol Lt. Eric Sheppard.

Connell was a prominent Republican political consultant. He founded New Media Communications in Richfield, which developed campaign Web sites for Republican presidential candidate John McCain and President George W. Bush.

The plane was attempting to land around 6 p.m. Friday at Akron-Canton Airport when it crashed about three miles short of the runway.

Taylor Fano, who lives two doors away from the crash site on Charolais, said she heard the crash.

"It blew up and shook the ground a little bit," Fano said. "I was standing in the kitchen and I looked out the window and all I saw was fire."

Fano said the plane came down in the front yard at 2017 Charolais, then skidded along the side of the house.

The plane came down between two houses, separated by about 100 feet, in the upscale neighborhood. Neighbors said one of the homes was unoccupied, while the other was lighted with holiday decorations.

They said wreckage from the plane could be seen sticking up from the ground.

"It took out the flagpole and the cement blocks surrounding the flagpole like a little planter," Fano said. "It skidded across the driveway and right in between a line of pine trees and a small fence around an in-ground pool."

Neighbor Julie Hufstetler, who lives across the street from the crash site, said she was getting ready for a party at their home when she heard the explosion.

"It was kind of a swish and a boom," she said.

When she looked outside, she saw flames billowing from the garage.

Greentown Fire Department Capt. Lorin Geiser said he arrived within three minutes of getting several 911 calls about a plane down.

Geiser said the crumbled fuselage from the plane was fully engulfed. It took less than five minutes to extinguish the flames.

The burning debris apparently set fire to the side of the garage of the unoccupied home.

There was no interior damage to the house.

Several neighbors, bundled up against the frigid temperature, were walking around taking pictures with their cell-phone cameras.

The plane was on final approach to Akron-Canton Airport's Runway 23 when it went down, said Kristie Van Auken, spokeswoman for the airport.

Van Auken identified the plane as a Piper Saratoga, a single-engine propeller craft capable of carrying up to seven passengers.

The plane, which was made in 1997, is owned by a Richfield corporation, Sierra-November Aviation, at 3046 Brecksville Road, according to the Federal Aviation Administration registry.

FlightAware, a Web site that tracks flight plans, reported that the plane was coming from College Park, Md., departing at 3:31

p.m. and scheduled to arrive at Akron-Canton at 5:43 p.m.

The plane had flown from Akron to College Park Thursday morning.

Van Auken didn't think the plane was based at the Akron-Canton Airport, but added, "We can't verify that at this time."

Investigators from the National Transportation Safety Board were expected at the crash site Friday night. An FAA spokeswoman said investigations typically take weeks and even months or longer to complete.

In addition to the Greentown Fire Department, others responding included firefighters from Hartville, Uniontown, Plain Township and North Canton.

Van Auken said several members of the airport operations staff were also at the crash scene.

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