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Trucker hailed as a hero

Driver's emergency manoeuvres before his death prevented more crashes on Highway 400, OPP says

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David Virgoe had so much to live for.

Just a month ago, the 48-year-old truck driver became a grandfather for the fifth time.

He and his wife, Debbie, were in the final stages of buying a large home in Angus after years of renting one in Innisfil. They were planning to move in July.

"We worked so hard to get this house and we had three weeks to go and now ... he's gone," she said, her voice barely a whisper.

The new house was a chance for Virgoe to eventually move off the road and spend more time with the family, his wife said.

Now, his large family is left to pick up the pieces of a life cut short by a crash involving three suspected road racers. Police said two racers allegedly cut Virgoe off Monday on Highway 400 near Bradford.

Three drivers face 11 charges after the crash of Virgoe's tanker truck that closed the highway for most of the day.

A preliminary investigation has revealed that Virgoe's emergency manoeuvres prevented additional collisions, the OPP said. After losing control in the northbound lanes, Virgoe hit the middle guard rail then swerved back into the northbound lanes to avoid slamming into southbound traffic. The vehicle, weighing about 19,000 kilograms, crashed down an embankment where he was pinned.

His family says Virgoe gave his life trying to save others.

"I believe he was the hero in this," his brother Don, 47, said yesterday, describing his brother as having the biggest heart in the family. "He took his truck off the road for sure. That's David all the way. "

Virgoe didn't have personal life insurance, according to family members who were in Barrie yesterday picking up his personal effects.



David Virgoe died a hero. The truck driver from Innisfil is seen showing one of his grandchildren "the ropes" of his big rig.

The last time Debbie saw her husband of 22 years was last Sunday, Father's Day, when he met his month-old grandson, Joshua, for the first time.

Virgoe was in a good mood that day, Debbie said with a laugh as she remembered her husband chasing her 29-year-old daughter, Bobbi, around the backyard with a fake snake. The couple had three children, two from her first marriage.

When they first met, her future husband made a big impression on Debbie. "On our first date, he picked me up in a dump truck," she recalled. "After that, we just sort of stuck together. It's been fun and it's been too short."

Virgoe will also be missed at Wilburn Archer Trucking in Norwood, east of Peterborough, where he won numerous safe-driving awards during his 17 years there.

On Monday, Virgoe had just dumped off a load of sand in Guelph and was going to pick up another load in Midland when the crash happened.

"It's a sad day to own a trucking company," said Wilburn Archer, 52, adding that this was the first driving fatality in the company's 29-year history. "He was an excellent driver. Whatever job he did, he did to the best of his ability," the trucking owner said. "He was from the old school. He was one of those guys who would never drive by if you were broke down. He was just a genuine good man."

Virgoe grew up in Thornhill and Vaughan as the oldest of five brothers and a sister who live around southern Ontario.

He had been driving trucks since he was 16. In the family construction business, David drove a dump truck. But his real dream was to drive a big rig. He left the family business to begin driving big rigs full-time, his brother Don said.

Virgoe was so adept at driving that Don remembers his brother never having an accident or even a close call. "He always got himself out of any kind of situation."