

FRANKFORT, Ky. — Sound asleep, Cathy Bailey said she never heard the alarm triggered by the early Christmas Day fire that claimed the lives of her two young grandsons.

"I had stayed up to do stocking stuff for the boys," she said.

But the 4:30 a.m. alarm at the Glenview home woke her husband, Irving W. Bailey II, who desperately tried to get his wife and visiting family members outside, even as the fire engulfed and destroyed the house.

"I don't think you ever think it's going to happen that fast," he said.

Now the Louisville couple are working to increase awareness of fire prevention and safety.

In their first public comments about the Dec. 25 fire, Irv Bailey, a former chief executive of Providian Corp., and Cathy Bailey, a former U.S. ambassador to Latvia and major Republican fundraiser, spoke during a visit to Frankfort Wednesday of their sorrow and their determination to prevent other families from such a loss.

"I hope we can do something positive," Cathy Bailey said.

The Baileys appeared in the Senate, where Sen. Ernie Harris, R-Crestwood, introduced a resolution in memory of the Baileys' grandsons, Solon L. Bailey, 12, and his brother, William "Liam" Bailey, 10, of Barre. Vt. The House offered a similar resolution.

The boys, asleep in an upstairs bedroom, died of smoke inhalation in the fire. Their parents, Deanna and Chris Bailey, got out of the house safely, as did Irv and Cathy Bailey.

The Baileys said Wednesday that, although the exact cause of the fire may never be known, investigators believe it started in a ceiling space above the downstairs dining room — and under the floor of the upstairs room where the two boys were sleeping.

They said they were stunned by the speed with which it spread.

Fire investigators later told them they had no more than two to three minutes to get out of the house, the Baileys said. Though they and firefighters tried to rescue the boys, they were driven back by smoke and flames.

Once firefighters realized they could not save the children, they "knelt in the front yard of our home and said a prayer," Cathy Bailey said.

She said she isn't sure what form their activism will take, but it will involve more public education about fires and how to prevent or survive them.

Meanwhile, the family must live with the grief, Irv Bailey said.

"As hard as it is for the grandparents, you can't imagine what it's like for the parents," he said. "They're going to get through this but the boys will be in their memories every day of their lives."

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