The Hauptman-Woodward Medical Research Institute has been notified that at 7:17 p.m. on Thursday, November 13, 2008 a small plane went down in a Tallahassee neighborhood, killing HWI Board Chairman Donald Hess and his wife Victoria and injuring two others on the ground.

It has been reported by the National Transportation Safety Board that the plane was heading to Tallahassee Regional Airport when it crashed into a house two miles short of the runway. The plane, a Cirrus SR-22, was equipped with a rocket-propelled parachute, which did not deploy during the crash. The crash is being investigated by the NTSB to determine the cause.

“We are shocked and saddened by the loss of Don and Victoria who championed HWI within the community and supported the Institute generously in every possible way,” HWI CEO Dr. Ed Lattman said. “Don was a dedicated chairman of the board and a cherished friend of the Institute. He was an almost daily presence at HWI and very much a part of the fabric of the Institute. We ask that everyone in the community keep their daughters, Lura Bechtel (Mitch) and Johanna, in your thoughts.”

“Don was a gracious leader and a gentleman. He led Hauptman-Woodward through a period of tremendous growth,” Chris Greene, Chairman of the HWI Foundation Board, said. “Both he and Vicky were Buffalo aficionados and supported the community in many, many ways. They will be greatly missed.”

“Don and Vicky Hess leave behind a true legacy of involvement and caring for their community. They represented the ideals of giving back thoughtfully and effectively in so many ways,” Bill Joyce, Chairman of the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus and former HWI board member, said.

An MIT graduate in electrical engineering, Hess in 1975 founded Amherst Systems, Inc. with partner Chuck Dowdell, a technology company that grew to more than 300 employees and $40 million in annual sales. Technical roles involved systems design and computer programming for high speed data acquisition systems, industrial process control, retail point-of-sale terminals, and automatic test equipment. As the company grew, the job became more administrative and included oversight of Finance, Legal, Human Resources, Contracts, Purchasing and Facilities.

The company was later sold in 1999 to Comptek Research Inc. which in 2000 became a part of Northrup Grumman. Northrop Grumman Amherst Systems now provides a complete post-delivery support solution and still operates in Western New York.

In 2002, Hess developed Amherst Tech Ventures LLC, a venture capital firm evaluating investments in Western New York and Southern Ontario which typical made investments ranging from $50,000 to $100,000.

Active in the community, Hess was a dedicated Albright-Knox supporter, chairperson of the Clarence Conservative Party, and served on the boards of several local organizations including the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus, Western New York Venture Association, Kinex Pharmaceuticals, LLC and Simply Audiobooks Inc. He also was active with the Toronto Angel Group.

The Hess’ were residents of Clarence, New York.