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Family mourns railroad conductor killed in yard accident

April 24, 2010 | By William Lee, Tribune reporter

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Melinda Carter lit up her mother's eyes recently when she talked about plans to buy a home in the southwest suburbs. But the bigger surprise was that Carter wanted her parents to sell their home in a rough Far South Side neighborhood and come live with her.

"She said, 'You're going to come move with me, you and daddy.' And that's what she always wanted ... to take care of her family," said her mother, Delois Carter.

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But on Saturday, family and friends gathered to mourn Melinda Carter's death. The 36-year-old train yard conductor for CSX Corp. was killed Friday night when she was tossed from a locomotive and struck by it. Carter was conducting routine switching operations while cars were being moved to prepare them for delivery, officials said. The accident occurred on the company's grounds near 134th Street and Ashland Avenue in Riverdale and an investigation is ongoing, a CSX spokesman said.

Carter, a veteran conductor, was a member of the company's safety committee, according to her brother, David. "It's not like she was a novice, not by a long shot," he said.

Family gathered at their Roseland home Saturday. In an upstairs room sat three pieces of new furniture Melinda Carter recently bought for the home she planned to buy. On the dining room table, family

pictures were scattered.

"I haven't found one yet (where) she isn't smiling," Delois Carter said of her daughter.

"She had a smile that was worth a million dollars and that smile was genuine," her aunt Gladys Taylor chimed in.

The youngest of three children, the Harlan Community Academy graduate was the heart of her family. She made sure her family was provided for, whether it was her parents were taking their medication or that her nephew had a nice pair of shoes.

"She had that spirit of knowing what you needed and when you needed it and how to love you," Delois Carter said.

Tribune reporter John Byrne contributed.

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