

Vigil reflects love for woman, 20

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About 100 family and friends held a vigil Sunday for Amanda Wienckowski, the 20-year-old Lewiston woman whose body was found Friday outside an East Side church.

The emotional outpouring was a testament to the love felt for a woman eulogized as a dear friend and beloved family member.

"You are a daughter, a great sister, a best friend and an amazing aunt that will be greatly missed," Nicole Dolly, Amanda's sister-in-law, struggled to say aloud as candles flickered in the bone-chilling cold.

"We'll never forget your laughter, your tenderness with others, your kindness to everyone . . . Amanda, we love you so much, and we'll never forget you."

The marchers walked a short distance from New Covenant United Church of Christ, where Wienckowski's body was discovered in a garbage tote at 7:55 a.m. Friday by a Buffalo police officer, to a home in the 100 block of Spring Street. It's where authorities say the young woman with a risky lifestyle was last seen. She had been reported missing Dec. 7.

Buffalo police have questioned a person of interest and an autopsy was completed Saturday, but have withheld comment on the circumstances of death. Wienckowski's father, Glenn, said Sunday he was unaware of new developments in the crime investigation, which was secondary to the grief he felt.

"We all miss my daughter. I just miss her, I just wish she was here. It's all a dream," Glenn Wienckowski said.

Some people carried pictures of the young woman. One family friend held a teddy bear that was hers as a child. Tears flowed as loved ones offered comforting embraces.

Minister Kenneth Pryor, a chaplain for prayer vigils of families of homicide victims, led the prayer.

Carolee Wienckowski, an older sister and one of nine siblings, said the large turnout helped ease the pain, if only a little.

"Everybody loved her. The minute she walked in a room, she brightened it," Wienckowski said.

"Amanda had the most determination of anyone you'd ever meet. No matter what happened, she always picked herself up and kept on going."

Wienckowski grew up in Kenmore before moving to Wheatfield, where she graduated from Niagara Wheatfield High School with a Regents diploma in 2006. Despite her struggles, which authorities said were connected to drug use, she enrolled in college earlier in the week.

"I watched her grow up from a little girl," said a devastated Josh Wulf. "You can't even begin to describe it. She was the sweetest girl -- she would have done anything for anybody."

Gabrielle Maracle also shared fond memories of the friend she grew up with in Kenmore.

"Amanda always made people laugh -- she was hysterical. She wouldn't like seeing everybody crying like this, she would have been making a joke," Maracle said.

Sheila Rogers and 11-year-old daughter Lanaya Lewis didn't know Wienckowski, but the North Division Street residents were on hand, too.

Rogers had received a knock on her door from a man going door to door days earlier seeking information on Wienckowski's whereabouts.

"Somehow I guess, because he knocked on my door, I felt a little connection. It's so sad," Rogers said.

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