

Slain woman's mom joins East Side anti-violence effort

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By Lou Michel

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Amanda L. Wienckowski was stripped and her long blond hair was hacked off before her body was stuffed upside down into a garbage tote near an East Side church, family members say.

These new details emerged as the mother of the 20-year-old Lewiston woman continued to push for more action by authorities to find the individual responsible for her daughter's death.

"She was found nude and upside down in a garbage can, and her hair had been chopped off, probably as a trophy," said Leslie Brill Fink. "That says to me some sick person murdered my daughter. Her death was senseless and cruel."

Authorities say that Wienckowski's body showed no outward sign of violence, but autopsy and toxicology results are not expected until early this week, according to Kevin Montgomery, spokesman for the Erie County Health Department. Wienckowski was also using heroin, family members have acknowledged.

"[The results] could come in Monday or Tuesday, it depends," Montgomery said.

Wienckowski's frozen body was found Jan. 9 in a garbage tote outside a church directly across from a Spring Street residence where she had gone the evening of Dec. 5 for what police believe was a paid sexual encounter. That was the last time family and friends heard from her.

Antoine Garner, 22, who lives at the Spring Street house, was charged several hours after Wienckowski's body was found, but those charges are related to an Oct. 18 rape in which he allegedly choked a woman. However, he has also been identified as a person of interest in the Wienckowski case.

Garner has said that Wienckowski was at the house, but later left, according to his mother, Sonya Garner.

"I want an arrest made. I want society to change," said Brill Fink, a Town of Tonawanda resident who now finds herself working with East Side advocates for justice and nonviolence.

At Wienckowski's funeral last weekend, members of her family circulated petitions for Charles Burgin, a city resident who is spearheading an effort known as "Brotherman's Progress," which is seeking a community summit meeting to come up with ways to alleviate violence among young people. More than 200 mourners signed petitions.

Burgin's goal is to collect 50,000 signatures from residents throughout Buffalo and its suburbs to present to federal, state and local elected officials in order to give them incentive to attend the summit and develop job-training programs and better ways to educate children, given the Buffalo School District's graduation rate of just 46 percent.

Burgin, who has attended more than 100 prayer vigils and funerals of individuals who have died as a result of violence, met last week for three hours with Brill Fink to share his vision of a community that works together and saves young people from horrible deaths.

"She is supportive of what I'm doing out in the community to try and change things," Burgin said. "I think it is a shame what happened to her daughter. It doesn't matter if you are white, black, Puerto Rican or Asian."

Because of his intimate knowledge of street violence, which includes his brother's fatal shooting by an assailant with an AK-47 in 1993, Burgin says it is possible that Wienckowski was being held captive during the five-week period she was missing.

"It is a possibility that [Brill Fink's] daughter may have been passed around from place to place. People have been known to do that," Burgin said.

Also working with Burgin is community activist Darnell Jackson, who knows the effects of violence better than most. His brother, Robert Jackson, was fatally shot by three gunmen in 1998. Now, his 32-year-old nephew, Clarence E. Jackson, has been missing for a week, and the family suspects foul play.

"I feel their pain," Darnell Jackson said of Wienckowski's family. "Violence has no boundaries if you're caught up in the wrong way of living. Without proper assistance, you can become a tragedy and a victim. That's why it is so important that we all come together," Jackson said.

He made an appeal that anyone with information on his nephew call police at 847-2255 or him at 570-9160.

Wienckowski had worked as a prostitute and was addicted to heroin, according to authorities and her acquaintances. But they also emphasized that she had planned to enter drug rehabilitation in hopes of starting a new life.

Whatever her daughter's mistakes were in life, Brill Fink says that she wants her death to serve as a catalyst for change.

"I would like people to join together against violence, drugs and street activities," Brill Fink said in urging people to sign Burgin's petitions. "I want parents to step up. There has to be a reason why Amanda was on this earth."

To obtain copies of the petition, Burgin can be reached at 207-4186 or at his organization's e-mail address: bromaninc@gmail.com.

"It could have been anyone's daughter," Burgin said. "It's time for the community to man-up and stand up."

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