

Wienckowski case's key figure tied to home invasion

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The last person known to have seen Amanda L. Wienckowski alive has been indicted in connection with an unrelated home invasion and robbery in July 2011 in the Town of Clarence, the Erie County District Attorney's Office announced Thursday.

Antoine J. Garner, 26, has been no stranger to the law since being questioned by police in the death of Wienckowski, whose frozen, naked body was found upside down in a trash tote across from his home in January 2009. He has never been charged in her death, which the Erie County Medical Examiner's Office ruled he death was due to an accidental overdose from opiates.

A second autopsy by a West Coast pathologist concluded she had been strangled.

Garner, along with David Holmes, 22, both of Cheektowaga, have now been charged with two counts each of first-degree robbery and second-degree robbery.

Garner and Holmes are accused of invading a Clarence home in the middle of the night on July 2, 2011, and forcing the female homeowner, who was home alone at the time, to open a safe at gunpoint.

Two men, both wearing ski masks, stole at least \$75,000 in cash and jewelry, then fled in a car, according to Erie County Sheriff's Detective Dan Brinkerhoff.

Investigators got their first break in the case when they recovered a ski mask near the crime scene. A DNA test led them to Holmes.

The other break came from workers at Airport Plaza Jewelers who identified a "high-end watch" that someone tried to pawn there the day after the break-in. The jewelers said the item was too expensive to sell at their store, and the man left. Authorities were able to identify the man as Garner, Brinkerhoff said.

Garner, who is already in jail awaiting trial in two other cases, was arraigned Thursday morning before State Supreme Court Justice Penny M. Wolfgang and ordered held without bail. He faces a maximum sentence of 25 years if convicted.

Garner has been charged with second-degree assault and second-degree strangulation in

connection with an attack on a Buffalo woman in July 2011. He faces a maximum of seven years if convicted of these crimes.

He also has been separately charged with multiple counts of third-degree rape and third-degree criminal sexual act in connection with assaults between December 2008 and January 2009 on a 16-year-old girl who was impregnated, authorities said. He faces up to 24 years if convicted of those charges.

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