

## **Cheli's slayings : ' Stupid , senseless ' - Stabbings of pair stun Wings' star, relatives; police suspect co-worker.**

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Author: The Detroit News ; Ronald J. Hansen and Oralandar Brand-Williams

DETROIT - Megan Jo Soroka was the dependable manager Chris Chelios turned to first in Dearborn, and later when he opened his restaurant in downtown Detroit.

Hardworking, trustworthy and dedicated, the Dearborn woman helped make **Cheli's** Chili Bar an instant fan favorite in Detroit, her friends said.

But in a cruel and jolting turn, Soroka, 49, was stabbed to death Tuesday morning at the hands of a disgruntled former employee, police said. Mark Adam Barnard, 52, a co-worker whose mother said had problems with another co-worker, also was killed, said sources familiar with the investigation. The restaurant is across the street from Comerica Park.

By Tuesday afternoon, investigators had arrested a 17-year-old former employee considered a suspect in the **slayings** . Police said the teen was fired about a month ago.

Despite Detroit's national reputation for violence, **slayings** downtown are a relative rarity. That such a brutal act would happen before the hockey star's restaurant opened for the day made it that much harder to accept.

Soroka "was a dedicated person to her work and to everybody else. Her work was so very important to her," said her mother-in-law, Erma Soroka of Farmington Hills. "I can't believe we won't be able to see her again. It's hard to accept."

Chelios "counted on her for everything because he travels so much," said Lisa Septer, a relative of Soroka who worked with her years ago.

Barnard's mother, Gwen Sharpe, said her son had told her on Christmas Day about recent problems with an employee.

"He said he was having a problem with one of the workers. I said tell Chris (Chelios) about it," recalled Sharpe. "Maybe he will get rid of him." She said Barnard said the worker was "kind of lazy."

"I never dreamed it would be carried out like it was on Mark and that poor woman," said 71-year-old Sharpe.

Sharpe, who came to Detroit in 1955 when her son was just a toddler, described Barnard as a hard worker and good cook who really liked making pizzas.

Sharpe saw the broadcast reports Tuesday morning from the scene of the restaurant but didn't pay much attention because she thought the news was centered on the restaurant's preparations for a party marking the retirement of former Red Wings Captain Steve Yzerman's jersey.

"I can't believe it. I still can't believe it. It's like a dream. It hasn't settled in yet," said Sharpe, of Fowlerville.

Dorothy Craig, a family friend, said after attempts by Barnard's brother, Paul, to reach him on his cell phone, the family realized that Barnard was one of the victims.

"He kept calling (Barnard's) cell phone and calling and he didn't answer it," Craig said. "We all hoped and prayed it wasn't Mark."

Besides his mother and brother, Barnard is survived by his longtime girlfriend, Pat, and two sisters, Juanita and Lorie. His funeral will be Saturday, the family said.

Chelios offers condolences

"We are deeply saddened by the tragedy that occurred at our establishment this morning. Our hearts go out to the families of the victims - they were wonderful employees and were part of our family," the Red Wings defenseman said in a statement.

"We are cooperating fully with the Detroit Police Department in their investigation and are hopeful the perpetrator will be brought to justice in quick order. We appreciate the community's support at this difficult time."

Chelios, who is injured, did not skate at practice and did not play in Detroit's 2-1 win against Anaheim on Tuesday night. He will not travel with the team today so he can deal with matters at his bar, coach Mike Babcock said. The bar closed for the day; it's not clear when it will reopen.

**Cheli's** Chili Bar at Adams and Witherell was preparing to open when someone called to report the incident, said Detroit Police Chief Ella Bully-Cummings. Police swept through the three-story building, including the rooftop, to ensure there were no other victims.

Authorities found the employees dead on the second floor.

One of Soroka's longtime friends, Candyce Giordano of Grosse Ile, was distraught.

"I can't say enough good things about her. It's a **stupid** , **senseless** act," said Giordano, who said she had known Soroka for 20 years.

"Based upon the information we have right now, a former disgruntled employee may be responsible," Bully-Cummings said Tuesday. The chief said the stabbings happened about 9 a.m.

Bar is hotspot

The bar and restaurant, which opened in 2005 in the historic former Women's Exchange Building, is a popular spot for diners.

Chelios opened his Dearborn location in 2003.

Soroka and her husband, Christopher, met at a bar she managed, Septer said. He owns a bar in Dearborn, which made it difficult for the couple to find spare time.

Erma Soroka said her family had planned to visit Megan and Christopher on Tuesday night, their first chance to get together since before the holidays.

The couple had hoped to operate a bed and breakfast someday, Septer said.

Caption: Detroit Police cordon off traffic Tuesday at Adams and Witherell near **Cheli's** Chili Bar across from Comerica Park. A 17-year-old former employee was being questioned in the **slayings** of Megan Jo Soroka, 49, and Mark Adam Barnard, 52. Soroka

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