

## **FRIENDS , FAMILY REELING AFTER DEATHS AT CHELI'S - EX-WORKER TO BE ARRAIGNED IN 2 STABBINGS IN DETROIT**

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A 17-year-old former employee of **Cheli's** Chili Bar was in custody Tuesday - the prime suspect, police said, in a double slaying that reportedly began as a fight, then turned into a pair of stabbings **at** the popular Detroit spot owned by Red Wings defenseman Chris Chelios.

Mark Barnard, 52, of Detroit and Megan Soroka, 49, of Dearborn, employees **at** the restaurant located outside Comerica Park, were killed about 9 a.m. Tuesday, police said.

Police spokesman James Tate said the suspect, described as a disgruntled ex-employee who was fired about a month ago, could be arraigned on murder charges as early as this morning.

The Detroit resident was arrested without incident **at** a home on the city's west side.

According to police who interviewed employees Tuesday, he went to the restaurant Tuesday morning and fought with Barnard, the kitchen manager. It was unclear what the argument was about. He stabbed Soroka when she tried to intervene, they said.

Police said the former employee took money from an open safe. Police searched two Detroit homes the suspect was known to frequent, and officers seized up to \$10,000 bound in paper bands marked " **Cheli's** ." The weapon has not been recovered.

Employees told police they recognized the suspect as he ran out of the restaurant.

"We have no idea why anyone would do this to such a kind, gentle man," said Cheryl Niedermeyer-Bedford of Dearborn Heights, whose mother, Pat Niedermeyer, lived with Barnard and had been involved with him for 23 years.

"He was like a duck," she said. "Everything rolled off his back like water."

Pat Niedermeyer said Barnard left for work about 7:15 a.m. and asked for a kiss good-bye.

"He always said, 'Because you never know what could happen,' " she said. He called when he got to work to say he was OK, she added.

Niedermeyer, her daughters and Barnard's **family** spent Tuesday morning trying to learn whether he was among those killed **after** news of the stabbings broke. They repeatedly called Barnard's cell phone; he never answered.

They didn't learn for sure, Niedermeyer-Bedford said, until the head cook for **Cheli's** arrived at their Detroit doorstep about 2 p.m.

Meanwhile, Soroka's husband, Christopher, got a phone call early Tuesday as he began opening his own establishment - The Bar on Michigan Avenue in Dearborn.

Roland Kinney, 67, who was **at** The Bar **at** the time, said Christopher Soroka then rushed out: "He just said somebody was hurt." .

Also **at** The Bar was Soroka's **friend** Michael Mortada, 27. "That woman is his life," he said, his voice shaking.

Bar employees and patrons said the Sorokas were longtime **friends** of Chelios. An autographed picture from a recent Christmas party hanging **at** The Bar shows a smiling Christopher Soroka with Chelios. The note reads: "To Topher - All the best."

George Soroka, Megan Soroka's brother-in-law, said she was an integral part in Chelios opening his downtown location. He also has a restaurant in Dearborn, which closed Tuesday because of the stabbings. By mid-afternoon, a floral arrangement stood outside that restaurant's closed doors with a balloon that said, "You'll Be Missed."

Soroka and Barnard had worked **at** the Dearborn restaurant before moving to the downtown location, their **family** members said.

"They were good **friends** ," George Soroka said of his sister-in-law and Chelios. "She was integral in starting the downtown **Cheli's** . She was very outgoing, very sweet."

Chelios opened the Detroit restaurant in 2005, and it quickly became a hot spot for downtown sports-goers - especially during big events, such as the Super Bowl and the Detroit Tigers' playoff run.

A giant banner hung on the side of the building, thanking Red Wings icon Steve Yzerman and bearing his number, 19, which was retired Tuesday night.

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

Lynne Woodison of the "JJ & Lynne Morning Show" on WCSX-FM (94.7) said she got to know Megan Soroka through Chelios, who usually talks on the show.

"Megan was just a delightful person," she said through tears Tuesday night. "She was just this ball of energy. You couldn't help but like her."

She said the workers were like **family** , and that everyone was preparing for a big party Tuesday night, **after** Yzerman's jersey number was retired.

Chelios' teammate Kirk Maltby said he was shocked.

"Whatever happened, it's awful," he said. "What do you say? ... Hopefully, whoever did it comes to justice."

That's what the victims' **families** are asking for now, too.

"How can anybody do this?" Barnard's sister, 51-year-old Juanita Philpott, asked through tears. "He never gave anybody any problems. I don't understand any of this."

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ILLUSTRATION: Map Detroit Free Press;Photo

CAPTION: Soroka played a large part in Chelios opening **Cheli's** Chili Bar in Detroit, her brother-in-law said. The restaurant is popular with sports fans.

Soroka **family** photo

The other victim, Megan Soroka, 49, of Dearborn, was killed when she tried to intervene, police said.

REGINA H. BOONE / Detroit Free Press

One of the victims, Mark Barnard of Detroit, takes a break from preparing food to talk with Chris Chelios in Dearborn in October 2003. An angry ex-employee is blamed for Barnard's **death** .

AMBER HUNT / Detroit Free Press

**Cheli's** Chili Bar in Dearborn was closed **after** the killings Tuesday. Both victims had worked there.

MARY SCHROEDER / Detroit Free Press

George Soroka, Megan Soroka's brother-in-law, waits outside the bar, wondering whether she's OK.

CAPTIONWRITER: MARY SCHROEDER / Detroit Free Press

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