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# Rocky Mountain News

**Thursday, January 3, 2008**

## 'There's no accident about it,' slain girl's aunt says

*Man arrested in shootings says he fired at streetlight*

**Kevin Vaughan and Lynn Bartels**

**Originally published 12:30 a.m., January 3, 2008**

**Updated 09:04 a.m., January 3, 2008**

On the north side of an undulating park that cuts through a west Denver neighborhood, a 25-year-old man stood in an apartment house parking lot and raised a .44-caliber handgun toward a streetlight.

Three-hundred yards to the south, on the other side of the park, about a dozen family members gathered in a small, white home with a snowman on the front porch, welcoming 2008.

It was about 12:15 a.m. Tuesday, and the fireworks outside were just dying down.

And then, horror as a single bullet ripped through the front wall of the home, killing 47-year-old Becky Yanez and wounding a distant cousin, 11-year-old Angelica Martinez, who died a short time later at a hospital.

That picture emerged Wednesday as Denver police continued their investigation of two deaths that shocked a neighborhood, and a 25-year-old man suspected in the killings made his first court appearance.

A judge ordered that Pedro Cortez, the Denver native arrested in the shooting, remain in jail pending the filing of formal charges. Cortez told police investigators that he was shooting at a streetlight with a .44-caliber revolver, according to court documents.

During his first court appearance Wednesday, Cortez wore blue jeans and a white T-shirt and stood impassively before Denver County Judge Melvin Okamoto.

Cortez's attorney, Harvey Steinberg, asked the judge to schedule a bail hearing, but Okamoto made no decision on that request.

Relatives of Yanez and Martinez sat toward the front of the courtroom while members of Cortez's extended family sat near the back.

"I love you," Cortez mouthed to them as he left the hearing.

It was an emotional hearing for both families.

"We're getting by," Norma Kaholo, who is related to both victims, said afterward.

Martinez, a student at Lake Middle School, was her niece. Yanez was her mother's cousin.

Cortez has been in trouble before, but after being convicted of a 1999 robbery he had successfully completed probation, court records show.

"He was doing really good," his niece, Melissa Aragon, 19, said.

In a strange twist, Kaholo realized that she is acquainted with Cortez's wife.

"We're all family," Kaholo said outside the courtroom. "What's done is done."

She said she is acquainted with Cortez's wife through a sister, and called the relationship "a friend of a friend of a friend."

Kaholo said she had no hard feelings toward Cortez's wife.

"I give her my sympathy," she said.

But she also quarreled with the notion that the two deaths were the accidental result of someone shooting a gun to welcome the new year.

"There's no accident about it," she said. "An accident is cleaning a gun. This wasn't an accident. What goes up must come down."

Police initially thought the fatal shot must have been fired from a high-powered rifle because it had traveled so far. But Cortez told investigators he was firing a handgun, according to the affidavit filed for his arrest.

Denver police spokesman Sonny Jackson said ballistics tests had not been finished Wednesday.

"Until we get some other things done, we won't know what weapon was used," Jackson said.

Cortez told investigators he was standing in a parking lot in the 1200 block of Winona Court - across Lakewood and Dry Gulch Court from the home at 4708 W. 11th Ave. where Yanez and Martinez were hit.

When detectives stood in the place where Cortez said he fired at the streetlight, the home "was directly in the background to the south," according to the affidavit.

Cortez was arrested Tuesday, about 11 hours after the shooting.

An apartment in the 1200 block of Wolff Street, just around the corner from the parking lot where the fatal bullet was apparently fired, was searched by police investigators.

Aragon, Cortez's niece, said he and his wife have a girl about 9 months old. She said her uncle baby-sat his daughter full time.

Her uncle and his family moved about a month ago into an apartment, Aragon said. She believes the apartment is the same address on Wolff Street that police searched Tuesday.

The neighborhood is dotted with apartments, some shabby looking.

Claudia Salinas, who lives next door to the Wolff Street apartment, said the neighbors were having a party on New Year's Eve. About six of the partygoers were standing outside.

"They were making too much noise, and I came outside and talked to these boys.

I tell them to turn down the music, but they turned it on louder," Salinas said.

Salinas said she called police but got no response.

Shortly afterward, neighbors heard what sounded like fireworks, but turned out to be gunshots.

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### **Memorial fund**

The family of Angelica Martinez has established a fund in her memory. Donations can be made at any TCF Bank to the Angelica Martinez Memorial Fund.

# **CU Boulder News**

## **National Public Radio Broadcast Features CU-Boulder Research On Engaging Girls In Computing**

Jan. 2, 2008

A study by University of Colorado at Boulder researcher Lecia Barker on encouraging girls to engage in computing education and careers will be featured on the public radio program "The Best of Our Knowledge" on Jan. 7.

"The Best of Our Knowledge," one of several national programs produced by WAMC Northeast Public Radio in Albany, N.Y., covers issues unique to college campuses, including descriptions of research and commentary from experts and administrators. The program is not available on Colorado public radio stations but can be accessed as an MP3 file on the Web at: <http://stream.publicbroadcasting.net/production/mp3/wamc/local-wamc-660942.mp3>.

Barker is the director of the Assessment and Research Center at the ATLAS Institute at CU-Boulder.

In the show, Barker talks about her research partnership with the Computer Magnet Program in Denver Public Schools. The magnet program, located at both North and Thomas Jefferson high schools, helps students develop real-world technical and leadership skills. The study had a dual focus on the messages that recruiters use in trying to persuade middle school girls and what kinds of messages actually appeal to girls.

"Even though teachers are intimately familiar with what kids care about, they often start

by trying to get them interested in computer programming - an instant turnoff with most boys and girls," Barker said. "They are not interested in the programming, but in what they can produce with programming. Once they have a project goal, technical skills will follow. Middle school girls want to do something socially valued, such as human or veterinary medicine."

The Computer Magnet Program and the ATLAS Institute encourage education in technological fields and work on expanding opportunities for all young people to use technology. Together, Barker notes, they are determining more effective ways to recruit girls for technology classes. The ATLAS Institute and the Computer Magnet Program also partner on Digital CUrrents, a summer technology camp in which ATLAS students teach high school students technology development skills and the high school students then teach middle school students the same skills.

"The Best of Our Knowledge" program gives researchers a voice, providing them a direct pipeline for publishing their studies, through audio files, to a national audience. Barker's broadcast segment is the first in a series of eight focusing on the changing role of girls and women in science, engineering and mathematics.

Barker also is a senior research scientist in the National Center for Women and Information Technology, which is housed in the ATLAS institute. The program aims to encourage girls and women to enter information technology careers. The ATLAS Institute focuses on making information technology available to people in non-technology fields.

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