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Teen arrested in rape, slaying

Victim was employee at home for troubled youths

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CLEARFIELD — Police arrested a 17-year-old boy accused of raping and stabbing a woman to death late Wednesday in a group home for troubled teens.

Police were called at 10:45 p.m. to 286 Marilyn Drive where officers found a car that had crashed into the side of a small red-brick home. A pair of tire tracks extended from the street through the fresh snow, over the curb and through some bushes to where they abruptly stopped outside Doug Mahlsted's home.

"I heard a loud pop like someone dropped something huge and heavy, and the house shook like it was an earthquake," Mahlsted said.

Outside he found a Honda Accord against his house. A young man was in the driver's side of the car, barefoot but wearing a bloody shirt and jeans.

Mahlsted reported the young man said he had committed a crime, "he was a bad person, and he should die," Mahlsted said. "He tried to kill himself by driving into the side of my house."

Just up the street, yellow crime-scene tape surrounded the house at 396 Marilyn Drive. Clearfield Assistant Police Chief Greg Krusi said officers found inside a 22-year-old employee of the group home who had been sexually assaulted and had multiple stab wounds to her neck and torso. The woman was taken to Davis Hospital and Medical Center, where she later died.

The 17-year-old suspect was treated at the hospital for injuries he received in the crash.

"The complete motive for this vicious and senseless act is unknown," Krusi said in a statement Thursday. "The suspect did state that he had thought for some time the victim was cute, and he was infatuated with her."

Police said Thursday the victim was Raechale Elton.

Mahlsted said he kept talking to the 17-year-old while waiting for police to arrive. He would not let the boy leave the car.

"He tried to take the knife out and said, 'You should stab me, kill me now.' I told him to keep it in his pocket," he said.

The teen lived with a staff member inside the modest, red-brick home owned by Youth Health Associates. It is an independent living home for troubled youths who have graduated from a group

home, said YHA owner Dr. Chris Hughes.

"He's here with somebody," Hughes said outside the crime scene Thursday. "He had trust, he goes to school, looks for a job."

Hughes said the victim had given the teen a ride home from a nearby group home for troubled teens run by YHA. The male staff member who was supposed to be with the teen became tied up in traffic by Wednesday's storm, he said.

YHA employees declined to discuss the teen and what brought him to the youth facility except to say he had been referred to them by the state of Utah. The Utah Department of Human Services said the 17-year-old had gone through the juvenile court system and had been in state custody since February 2004.

"He was in a very structured group home for about a year," Human Services spokeswoman Carol Sisco said. "Last February, he was moved to the independent living program. It's a transitional program for youths that had just about completed their sentences."

Sisco said she could not talk about what crimes the teen had been convicted of as a juvenile. Caseworkers with the Division of Juvenile Justice Services were perplexed by the crime, she said.

"As late as Tuesday, he met with his caseworker and had a therapy session," Sisco said. "There weren't any indications of any problems. We found out he was skipping school on occasion, so the worker talked to him about that a little bit."

Mahlstede said the teen told him he'd just been released from a treatment center. "He said, 'I played 'em into thinking I was OK and letting me out,' " Mahlstede recalled.

Asked for comment on what the teen may have said, Hughes refused to talk about the boy. "We didn't know him as well as we thought we did," he said.

Neighbors didn't know the troubled-teen facility was there.

"I think I'd like a little notification from the city just to feel safe," Marina Koehler said. "It's just a shock that I wasn't notified when I purchased my home or moved in."

The YHA group homes are licensed by the city of Clearfield and the state of Utah. Police said YHA has operated the group home for several years without any serious incidents. Hughes said the teens in their group homes receive therapy, go to school and work. Staff members are trained according to state regulations, he said.

"This was a person who cared about her work," Hughes said of the victim. "We are saddened by this loss."

Hughes met with the members of Utah Department of Human Services' Office of Licensing on Thursday, director Ken Stettler said. An investigation is now under way into YHA's Clearfield facility.

"We recommended he get grief counselors in there for the staff and kids," Stettler said. He said YHA has been fairly exemplary, with only a few minor citations in the past six years.

Davis County Attorney Mel Wilson said the teen would likely be charged today as an adult with aggravated murder and sexual assault.

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