

# Arraignment expected today in student death

BY MARGARET O'BRIEN  
STAFF WRITER

Kenneth Ray Tranchida, the 41-year-old Southfield man who police arrested without incident early Tuesday in a Detroit apartment, is expected to be arraigned on murder charges in 46th District Court today in the death of Oakland University student Tina Bigger.

The Oakland County prosecutor's office was presented with the warrant request by Southfield police late Wednesday and could decide as early as today what charges, if any, will be authorized.

Police said they were seeking a murder warrant against Tranchida, described as a transient who grew up in Southfield and lived there, on and off, for several years. Tranchida is being held in Southfield's city jail, where he has been since early Tuesday morning, on a probation violation and was unavailable for comment.

As of Wednesday, Tranchida had no legal counsel, according to a spokesperson for the 46th Dis-

trict Court in Southfield. An attorney is expected to be appointed at his arraignment Thursday.

Tranchida's arrest ended a nationwide manhunt that began Thursday when police found Bigger's decomposed body behind the Southfield house that Tranchida's aunt once lived in near Nine Mile and Lahser.

Of the hundreds of tips called and sent into police, many of them pointed to an apartment at 678 Seiden in Detroit.

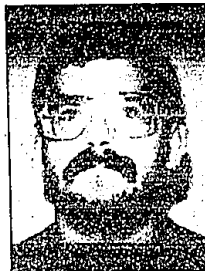
Detroit police secured the apartment shortly after midnight and were joined by Southfield police who took Tranchida, who had apparently tried to kill himself, into custody.

Detroit police said when they went into the apartment they found Tranchida standing in the bathroom bleeding into the sink from cuts in both his wrists that he apparently inflicted with small blades snatched out of a disposable shaver.

Southfield police took Tranchida to Detroit Receiving Hospital



Tina Bigger



Kenneth Tranchida

for treatment of the cuts. He was released that night and taken to Southfield police headquarters where investigators questioned him for more than six hours.

Southfield police Chief Joseph Thomas said Tranchida was very cooperative with investigators, but stopped short of character-

ing Tranchida's conversations as a confession.

"I can't say that's accurate. I can say he has been interviewed and we are seeking a murder warrant," Thomas said, adding that detectives are still trying to determine exactly what happened. "It's far from over," Thomas

said Tuesday. "We're still putting this case together."

Thomas would not discuss the substance of the department's interviews with Tranchida, but said he expects Southfield will retain jurisdiction over the crime — meaning that Bigger, 23, was probably killed in the city.

He added that the department wanted to be sure they had a full accounting of what happened before they went to the prosecutor because they want to maximize the charges.

Investigators and Oakland County Medical Examiner Kanu Virani have not been able to pinpoint the cause of death because of the severe decomposition of the body. After sitting in the field for nearly four weeks, most of the soft tissue — which would show any evidence of stabbing or strangulation — was missing.

Kanu said they were able to rule out blows to the head or stab wounds to the chest, which leaves stab wounds to the abdomen or strangulation among the possible causes of death.

"This is a very, very tragic event — the death of a young person. We will charge Mr. Tranchida with everything we can."

Thomas said. Farmington Hills police originally questioned Tranchida Aug. 29 at which time he turned over Bigger's car keys and led them to her car. They did not have enough evidence to hold him at the time.

Earlier reports placed Tranchida and Bigger together at a garage where her gray Honda was being repaired and at a local car dealership where they were contemplating buying a new car.

Police believe Bigger, a psychology student who attended Oakland University for three years, may have first come into contact with Tranchida through her university research on prostitution and AIDS.

Funeral services for Bigger were held Wednesday morning in Traverse City, her hometown. Several students and university representatives made the trip for the services.

## Suspect's family has shared triumph, tragedy

BY LARRY PALADINO  
STAFF WRITER

Tranchida. It has been a familiar and respected name in Southfield for several decades, thanks to the hard work of Joseph Tranchida, a long-time custodian in the public schools whose selflessness earned him two community service awards.

Now, though, the public is hearing about Ken Tranchida, his 41-year-old son, arrested in the slaying of Oakland University student Tina Bigger.

Suddenly, Joe Tranchida and his wife, Shirley, find themselves facing an array of emotions, beginning with empathy for the victim and her parents, who they said they'd like to contact to somehow express their condolences.

At the same time, though, there is some denial that Ken could have been involved.

"Every time I think about it, I just cry," Joseph Tranchida said Tuesday, by phone from his home, shortly after he and Shirley, his wife of seven years, had returned from the Southfield church where they attend Mass on a daily basis.

"I feel pretty bad about it. I'm

surprised it happened and am sorry for the parents of that girl," said Joseph Tranchida, whose first wife, Phyllis — Ken's mother — died 23 years ago.

"I never thought in my life that something like this would happen," he said. "I don't want to think he did it, but it's a possibility. I don't know."

Shirley Tranchida, the suspect's stepmother, said she and her husband are struggling to understand how such a tragedy would have occurred.

"We never know our children, I guess. Something like this always puts a little feeling of guilt inside you," she said. "You tell yourself, 'What did I do? What did I do that would make him do something like that?'"

She said Ken, "was a troubled kid, but it never seemed likely he could do anything so violent. At first, we both thought he couldn't have done it. But then, when they found the body at a place nobody else could have known about, well

"I'm anxious to find out how she died. I want to think that maybe he just lost his temper and hit her and she fell and hit her head. I can't see him brutally killing her."

Joseph Tranchida said Ken was 19 when his mother died, leaving Joseph with the task of raising the children alone, although the youngest already was about 11. The other five — Linda, Susy, David, Danny and Joey — turned out fine, Shirley Tranchida said, and all are married now with families. Ken was the only one who strayed.

"He's been in and out of prison for quite a while," his father said. "Hardly anybody can talk to him. He'll say 'yeah' to something, but will do whatever he wants anyway. He was like that from the time he was real young."

Shirley said Ken was married once, but had no children.

"He seems to fantasize a lot," she said. "He comes up with a lot of stories. He jumps from one thing to the next. Since I've

**I never thought in my life that something like this would happen. I don't want to think he did it, but it's a possibility. I don't know.'**

Joseph Tranchida  
suspect's father

known him he's been in and out of prison, more in than out. He just seemed to be a rebellious person who didn't like to work. Maybe he didn't have an easy life. When their mother died, Joe had to work and try to take care of the kids, too. Maybe Kenny didn't have a lot and wanted more things than he had."

Joseph Tranchida, retired from Southfield Public Schools for about 12 years, received the First Citizen of Southfield award in October of 1976 for his contributions to the community. It was sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce and the Southfield Eccentric.

Another time, he received a pla-

que honoring him as the Chamber of Commerce's Citizen of the Year, "for civic and humanitarian efforts on behalf of his family and the community at large."

The letter of nomination for the First Citizen award read, in part: "He is a big person in our community because he cares, and his care is more than thought and talk — it is translated into action."

He had been a widower for three years, yet he took into his home five children left parentless after the death of his daughter-in-law's father. Not only did Joseph Tranchida pay for the man's funeral and care for the children, he also went to court to find families

for all of them.

How was he able to feed five foster children, along with his own, during that time?

"I just put one big pot of spaghetti on the stove and that was it," he said Tuesday.

Among Tranchida's other volunteer work in the mid-'70s, he was active in the Southfield Civil Defense Auxiliary Deputy Police Corps. He worked on mock disasters staged annually by Providence Hospital emergency personnel and directed traffic at public events in the city. He did other community work as well.

Shirley Tranchida said they continue to go to Mass each day, if they can, despite what's happened. And, "most of the people in our parish have been very supportive."

Despite the publicity, "We have to go out there, regardless of what happens," Joseph Tranchida said. "I say the gods are with us. There's not much else we can do. We have to go out and face the world."

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