

# Lesbian couple's murder shocks gay community

Associated Press

ASHLAND, Ore. — The murder of a lesbian couple who fought an anti-gay rights measure last year has sent a shiver of fear and pain through their friends in gay and AIDS support groups.

Police discovered the bodies of Roxanne Ellis and Michelle Abdill in the back of their pickup truck Thursday in neighboring Medford, and authorities were investigating whether their deaths were linked to their activism.

"The gay community is rightly very concerned right now," said Medford police Sgt. Mike Moran. "But we have no real information pursuing the hate crime angle. We are also considering the possibility this could be a personal vendetta, a business grievance, and the less likely scenario of random crime."

Ellis, 54, and Abdill, 42, were domestic partners as well as partners in a Medford property management business.

"The shock and pain comes from the fact that these were very loving, gracious, giving women of faith," said the Rev. Michael Powell, pastor of the First United Methodist Church, where both women served in the leadership.

Ellis had an appointment on Monday to show an apartment. She phoned her daughter, Lorri Ellis, several hours later to say she was going shopping. Then an hour later, she phoned Abdill and asked her to come to the apartment to help jump-start her pickup.

That evening, Lorri Ellis drove by the apartment and told police she saw her mother's pickup drive away.

A cable television installer spotted the pickup Thursday afternoon in the parking lot of an apartment complex across town.

Police found the bodies of the women in the bed of the



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**Roxanne Ellis, 54, left, and Michelle Abdill, 42, whose bodies were discovered Thursday, were outspoken supporters of gay rights in Oregon.**

pickup, under a canopy. Both died violently, Moran said. Police withheld further details pending an autopsy.

Ashland is known as a haven for people who are different in a region not otherwise known for its tolerance.

But the rest of Jackson County, including Medford, is much more conservative.

Statewide, two ballot measures to limit gay rights were defeated by Oregon voters last year, but the latest won a majority in Jackson County, where the vote was 34,467 to 30,065.