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Woman's death an 'accident'

Rehoboth police charge two people with drug possession

by Lou Chibbaro Jr.

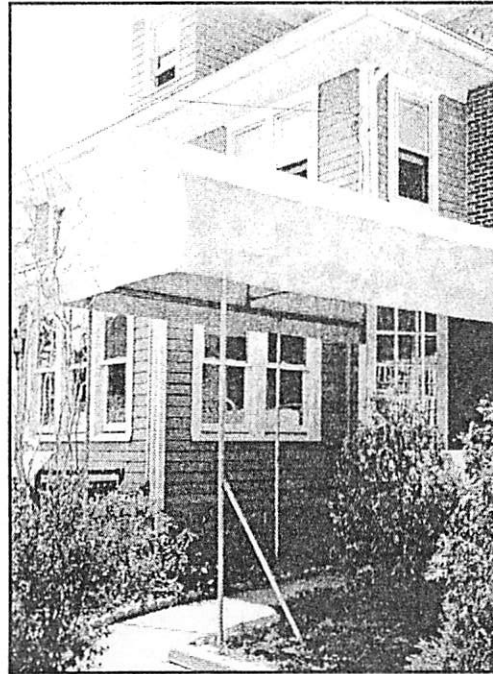
Rehoboth Beach restaurant co-owner Paige Berdini died from an accidental overdose of alcohol, cocaine, and heroin last month, the Delaware State Medical Examiner's office disclosed on June 27.

Berdini, 33, the part owner of the Cloud 9, one of Rehoboth's popular Gay restaurants and dance bars, was found unconscious on June 8 on the floor of the apartment of a friend after a night of partying, according to friends. She was pronounced dead one hour after emergency medical technicians transported her to Beebe Medical Center in Lewes, Del.

In what is believed to be a related development, Rehoboth Beach police late Wednesday, July 2, charged two people — Joyce Felton, owner of the Gay restaurant and bar The Blue Moon, and Gary "Gabby" Beel, a tenant in an apartment on the Blue Moon's property — with drug possession charges.

Rehoboth Police Det. Keith Banks said the investigation into events surrounding Berdini's death are continuing. He said the Sussex County, Del., District Attorney's office is looking into the possibility that Felton and Beel might be charged with another offense if it is determined that they supplied the drugs that led to Berdini's death.

Judith Tobin, the state's assistant medical examiner, said alcohol, cocaine, and heroin were present in Berdi-



The owner of the Blue Moon and a tenant there were arrested on drug charges.

by Clint Steib

ni's blood in "significant" quantities. But she added, "Alcohol alone was not enough to kill her."

Tobin, who conducted an autopsy of Berdini, told the *Blade* that there was no evidence that Berdini injected heroin into her system, indicating she consumed the drug through what Tobin called a "new trend" of inhaling it through the nose similar to the way cocaine is inhaled.

According to a police report, Berdini was stricken in the apartment of Beel, her longtime friend. The apartment is on the property of the Blue Moon, another of Rehoboth's most popular Gay restaurants and bars.

Those who knew Berdini have said her death has rocked the town's close-knit segment of the Gay community that frequents the Cloud 9 and other Rehoboth Gay bars. It has also become of the

"talk of the town" among Rehoboth's longtime Gay visitors on weekends, many of whom live in group houses scattered throughout the town.

"Everybody's talking about it, but too many people are in the state of denial," said one of Berdini's friends, who spoke on condition of anonymity. "Drug use has become widespread among many of the people in this town. No one seems to think about the consequences until it's too late."

Paige Berdini and her husband John Berdini opened the Cloud 9 with two other partners in 1994. ▼