

# Neighbors tie ribbons near journalist's ND home

By **DAVE KOLPACK**  
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Neighbors and friends in the hometown of an American journalist imprisoned in Iran came together last month to fill sandbags to fight off the rising Red River. Now they're joining to tie yellow ribbons around the trees near Roxana Saberi's home and urge her release from prison.

"We needed to show some signs of support," said Kevin Melicher, a neighbor of Saberi's parents, Reza and Akiko Saberi, in the quiet upscale neighborhood along the Red River.

Roxana Saberi, who grew up in Fargo, was convicted of espionage in

Iran last week after a one-day trial behind closed doors and was sentenced to eight years in prison. Friends and colleagues maintain she's a political pawn and not a spy.

On Tuesday, neighbors tied yellow ribbons around the trees and then added lace bows and a white ribbon with "Roxana" on it. They placed more than 100 ribbons, mostly on ash trees and some on cherry trees.

Arrick Olson was among the first to tie ribbons, along with his 5-year-old daughter, Evie. Olson said his daughter asked to help.

"She did. When she found out there were ribbons involved, it was hard to deny her," Olson said.

Jean Melicher, Kevin's wife, said she bought out most Fargo stores of yellow ribbons. When a neighbor asked where she could get more, Jean Melicher said, "Good luck with that."

"They're all gone in the city," she said.

Neighbors had hoped to decorate the Saberi house with a large yellow and white wreath, but they ran out of material.

Jane Voglewede said the ribbon-tying was timely because Roxana Saberi turns 32 on Sunday.

"Even if it's symbolic, this is something," Voglewede said. "To me, this is one of the efforts to keep it alive."

The neighbors' names were on a list put together last month, when Fargo fought off a record Red River flood. Residents of Saberi's neighborhood had piled sandbags about 3 feet high in their backyards.

Kevin Melicher said he greeted Reza Saberi during the sandbagging effort and told him "we were thinking of them."

"He thanked me and said they were leaving for Iran," Melicher said.

Reza Saberi, who was born in Iran, told The Associated Press that he and his wife visited his daughter Monday in Evin prison north of Tehran and that she was in good condition.

Iran's judiciary spokesman said

Tuesday that Roxana Saberi's prison term may be reconsidered on appeal, an indication her sentence will be commuted.

On Monday, the judiciary chief ordered a full investigation into the case, a day after President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad urged Tehran's chief prosecutor to ensure Saberi be allowed a full defense during her appeal.

Saberi moved to Iran six years ago and worked as a freelance journalist for news organizations including National Public Radio and the British Broadcasting Corp. She received Iranian citizenship because her father was born in Iran.

## NY family's murder-suicide deaths baffle friends

By **BILL BERGSTROM**  
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They seemed like an ideal Long Island family: William Parente was a lawyer, his wife Betty a stay-at-home mom active in the community. Their daughters were well-liked by teachers and classmates.

Friends and neighbors said they never suspected anything was amiss and were dumbfounded to learn the Parentes had died Monday in an apparent murder-suicide in a suburban Baltimore hotel room.

Experts say that's typical of family killings. Several similar high-profile cases in recent months have been tied to families' economic woes, though there's no indication that was the case with the Parentes.

They lived in a neighborhood of million-dollar homes in Garden City, N.Y., next to a golf course. William, 59, was a tax and estate planning attorney who commuted to his Manhattan office. Betty, 58, volunteered.

They were in Maryland to visit older daughter Stephanie, 19, a sophomore at Loyola College in Baltimore. With them was her sister, Catherine, 11, a sixth-grader at Garden City Middle School.

"I can't tell you how heart-sick I am," next-door neighbor Mary Opulente Krener said. "This is the most wonderful family, the most kind and lov-

ing family. I'm astounded."

The Parentes ate breakfast together Sunday morning and an employee of the Sheraton Baltimore North Hotel in Towson saw them together Sunday afternoon.

On Monday, after they failed to check out of their room on time, a housekeeper found their bodies.

Baltimore County police said they were investigating the deaths as a murder-suicide, but did not indicate who was the killer. They declined to release the results of autopsies conducted Tuesday.

Cpl. Michael Hill, a police spokesman, said only that the Parentes were not shot or stabbed.

A few hundred students and other mourners packed the chapel at Loyola for a memorial Mass on Tuesday night, some standing, some sitting on the altar or the floor. Two of Stephanie Parente's roommates read Scripture, and three other roommates offered tearful prayers on her behalf. They were introduced only by their first names and it was unclear who was speaking when.

"You brightened our lives, and we'll never forget you," one roommate said.

Maryland was already reeling from a similar tragedy when word of the Parentes' deaths began to spread. Sometime late Thursday night or Friday

morning, a father in a small northwest Maryland town fatally shot his wife and their three young children, police said.

The father, Christopher A. Wood, 34, then shot himself. Police revealed Tuesday that the family was having extreme financial problems.

An analysis by the Violence Policy Center in Washington, D.C., found an average of nine or 10 murder-suicides a week. But familicides — in which both parents and all their children are killed — generally happen only happen two or three times every six months, said Kristen Rand, legislative director for the center, a non-profit gun-control advocacy group.

"They were so rare that we didn't really bother to count them as a separate category," Rand said. But in the last few months, she said, "there's a clear rash" of such killings.

They can be tied to the nation's economic woes, said Richard Gelles, dean of the School of Social Policy and Practice at the University of Pennsylvania.

He describes familicides as "canaries in a mineshaft" — sensational cases that herald an uptick in more common forms of domestic violence.

"You can only speculate over whether the economy is going to affect the broad swath

of abuse of children and abuse of women," he said. "But the warning sign is when these familicide cases begin to cluster. In the past few months, they have begun to pop off across the country."

Familicides have also occurred this year in Los Angeles and Santa Clara, Calif., and in Belle Valley, Ohio. The slayings are usually committed by men, usually because of shame over financial problems, and people close to the families never see it coming, Gelles said.

While details of the Parente case remained sketchy, the reactions of those who knew the family fit the pattern.

The Parentes were "the most wonderful, beautiful, adorable people. This is impossible, impossible," said a sobbing Lucille Messina, who worked with Betty Parente on the board of the Tri Town Auxiliary of United Cerebral Palsy of Nassau. "I can't believe this, she's the sweetest lady you'd ever want to meet. You'd fall in love with her instantly."

The Rev. Brian F. Linnane, president of Loyola College, did not know Stephanie Parente well but had met her parents twice at an annual parents' gathering on Long Island.

"They were very memorable to me for how lovely they were. What a wonderful couple,"

Linnane said. "I'm stunned, because they were just very gracious and obviously devoted to their children."

Kremer, the Parentes' next-door neighbor and a clinical social worker, said she saw nothing to indicate the family was having financial or psychological problems. She did note that William's parents and Betty's mother had died somewhat recently.

Counselors were made available to students there and at Garden City Middle School. The younger daughter, Catherine, "was a wonderful, talented and sweet child who was treasured by teachers and staff members," according to a statement from the school system.

Stephanie was a former member of the women's crew team at Loyola and a coxswain for the men's team. She volunteered with Habitat for Humanity and at a Catholic school in Baltimore, and had been accepted to study abroad next year in Newcastle, England.

Such events are baffling even to theologians, Linnane said.

"It's very important for the students to realize that all of us are struggling with this mystery of evil," he said. "We're trying to find a way to move forward and bring some meaning to something that seems so meaningless."