

11-9-04 Napa Victims Mourned in 2 States
Pamela J. Podger, Chronicle Staff Writer

Friends and relatives of two young women slain last week in Napa will hold private memorial services today and Wednesday as police sift through evidence in the town's first double homicide in six years.

In Calistoga, a service will be held this afternoon at the Calistoga Community Presbyterian Church for Adriane Insogna, 26, a civil engineer with the Napa Sanitation District. Efforts are under way to establish a scholarship in her name.

"Right now, the outpouring of grief is intense. We're stunned," said Jeff Johnson, superintendent of the Calistoga Joint Unified School District. Insogna's mother, Arlene Allen, is a school board member.

Across the country in South Carolina, residents of the small town of Anderson are mourning the slaying of beauty queen Leslie Ann Mazzara, 26, and preparing for her services Wednesday at a local funeral home.

"It is just very tragic," said Danette Hanks, who says she was a "second mom" while Mazzara prepped for a local beauty pageant and then for Miss South Carolina. "Leslie was much more than a beauty queen and, as proud as she was of her crown, she's wearing a much bigger crown now as one of God's angels."

Whoever attacked the women in their Dorset Street rental home apparently had plotted the attack, but it "did not occur as planned," investigators said Monday, declining to elaborate.

The killer entered through an "unlocked portal," said Cmdr. Jeff Troendly.

A third roommate, who heard a commotion upstairs, escaped unharmed and called 911 on her cell phone at 2:07 a.m. Both victims had been stabbed repeatedly, investigators said, adding that they had no motive or murder weapon.

The slayings have left two communities to mourn and remember.

Insogna and her two sisters were raised in Calistoga by her single mother.

Friends say Insogna was a woman of remarkable inner strength who, at 16, was nearly killed in an auto accident when the car she was riding in flipped repeatedly. She suffered head trauma and required plastic surgery. Slowly she regained her cognitive and athletic skills and eventually excelled -- taking Advanced Placement calculus while playing softball and volleyball. Two years later, as a graduating senior at Calistoga High School, she became a recipient of an If Given A Chance scholarship. That annual \$2,500 grant helped support her each year at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, from which she graduated in 2000.

"To live through all of the adversity and then have this happen, it's a real shame," said family friend Brent Augustine.

Efforts are under way to create a scholarship in her name, said Jim King, the founder of the If Given A Chance scholarship, Michael Abramson, general manager of the Napa Sanitation District, and Johnson of the Calistoga school board and spokesperson at Napa Valley College, where Insogna took an advanced volleyball class and volunteered as scorekeeper.

"Adriane caught your attention. She had this impish smile that suggested that you've just been the

butt of a practical joke and you haven't figured it out yet," said Kirk Berger, interim athlete director at the college. "She was always giving. She was one of those people who got a lot out of being a giver. "

Volleyball coach Kelly Van Winden said Insogna was "very intense and very focused" when playing the game. Yet she had a fun-loving side, dying her hair purple or dressing up for last year's Halloween party in a 1950s poodle skirt and pink bow.

The Napa Sanitation District, where Insogna just celebrated her third anniversary, is a small office. "She was best friends with people here," Abramson said. "It isn't like they lost a co-worker but someone in their personal lives."

Tim Healy, who hired Insogna at the sanitation district, said he was impressed by her self-assurance, articulateness and ability to gain respect in a male-dominated world. He said she was proudest of her two young nephews -- their first steps, their first words. Her office was decorated with family images.

Bill Gaffney, another colleague, said Insogna was the captain of a local volleyball team. "She was our top spirit, and we played hard to please her," he said.

Co-worker Lily Prudhomme said the two had a trip planned for Australia on Nov. 25 to visit Insogna's younger sister, Allison. She said Insogna was fascinated with bridges, and they planned to climb Sydney's Harbour Bridge. "She was so excited about it. She told me several times that once she had done that, she could die a happy woman. I do intend to climb it for her," Prudhomme said.

Dorset Street neighbor Deanna Bevans said Insogna occasionally baby-sat, and Mazzara would chat after a jog. "They were friendly, outgoing and sweet as can be."

Mazzara grew up in her grandmother's house in Anderson, danced with the nearby Greenville Ballet Company and worked briefly as a paralegal in Columbia. In March, she moved to California to follow her dream of show business or the movies, said Kerri Owens, a pageant friend.

In April, Mazzara rose quickly in her job as a concierge, tour guide and sales associate at the stately Niebaum-Coppola Winery in Rutherford.

"She loved it in Napa and in California," said her grandmother, Judy Harrington, who relayed Mazzara's glee at the Thursday dances at the winery. "She was very happy there."

Jay Shoemaker, CEO of the Coppola Companies, said Mazzara made a strong impression on her fellow workers, and the winery has held several well-attended grief sessions since her death. "What stands out most is her charm, energy, poise and grace," he said.

Owens described how during the Miss South Carolina pageant, when the competing girls were

anxious and jittery, Mazzara would run into each dressing room to wish everyone good luck.

"Leslie was so bubbly, outgoing and very free-spirited," Owens said. "She loved being in the spotlight, and she was good at it."

Efforts are under way to raise \$250,000 for a cottage in Mazzara's name at the Calvary Home for Children in Anderson. She had championed the cause of preventing child abuse during her reign as a beauty queen.

"Everyone is just shocked -- Leslie's death is just breaking hearts," said Crystal Whitfield, who helped Mazzara at the Calvary Home for Children. "To have this happen is just tough on our tight-knit community."

She graduated in 1996 with honors from the Belton-Honea Path High School, where she was a member of the National Honor Society and National Beta Club for academic achievement. Her classmates voted her one of "tomorrow's entertainers," according to the principal.

Mazzara was crowned Miss Williamston 2002 and competed with a pointe ballet routine in July for Miss South Carolina. She worked with a county prosecutor to pass Stephanie's law, which tracks down people with repeated allegations of child abuse. At the time, Hanks recalled, she was a "mature and responsible" senior at the University of Georgia who graduated in philosophy in 2003. Mazzara brought attention to the neglect of Stephanie Carter, whose father and stepmother locked the 4-year-old girl in a small bathroom, chained her to the toilet and dumped bleach into the water to taint it. Stephanie died in October 2000 at the Greenville Hospital.

In 2002, Mazzara helped raise money with a Sit-A-Thon at the Anderson Mall, where shoppers donated \$982 to build a cottage for abused and neglected children at the Calvary Home. Last July, a similar event at an outdoor farmer's market raised \$937.

An evergreen tree -- representing Mazzara's consistent charm and poise -- will be planted soon at town hall or in the Mineral Spring Park.

"She had a passion for children or anyone defenseless," said Williamston Mayor Phillip E. Clardy. "So it is one tragic irony that she was a victim at another one's hands."

Memorial donations - Donations may be made in the memory of Adriane Michelle Insogna to the If Given A Chance Foundation, 3264 Villa Lane, Napa, CA 95448.

Contributions may be made in the memory of Leslie Ann Mazzara to the Calvary Home for Children, 511 W. Whitner St., Anderson, SC 29524.

E-mail Pamela J. Podger at ppodger@sfchronicle.com