

Minneapolis Gunman Was Fired Day Of Attack

BY PATRICK CONDON AND AMY FORLITI
Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — A man fired from his job at a Minneapolis sign-making business pulled out a handgun and began shooting up its offices, fatally wounding the owner and four others before turning the gun on himself, police said Friday.

Andrew Engeldinger, 36, injured at least three others in the Thursday attack at Accent Signage Systems, which Police Chief Tim Dolan said lasted no more than 15 minutes. Dolan also said Engeldinger may have chosen to spare some former co-workers.

"It's clear he did walk by some people, very clear," Dolan said.

Engeldinger's family said in a statement issued through the National Alliance on Mental Illness later Friday that he had struggled with mental illness for years. They offered sympathy to the victims.

"This is not an excuse for his actions, but sadly, may be a partial explanation," the statement said.

No details were released about why Engeldinger was fired, but police said he had ongoing problems at work. Investigators who searched his home Thursday night found a second gun and packaging for 10,000 rounds of ammunition in the house. In the shooting, Engeldinger used a 9mm Glock semi-automatic pistol he had owned for about a year, Dolan said.

"He's obviously been practicing in how to use that gun," Dolan said.

Among those killed was Accent Signage System owner Reuven Rahamim, 61, employee Jacob Beneke, 34; and Keith Basinski, 50, a UPS driver who had made deliveries and pickups at the business for years.

Relatives described Rahamim, who immigrated from Israel and spent three decades building his business after starting it in his basement, as a passionate cook and devoted to his family. Beneke was an avid sculpture artist and painter who worked as a digital imaging manager, and Basinski was a Wisconsin native dedicated to the Green Bay Packers who Dolan said "just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time."

The other two men killed were identified as Rami Cooks, 62, of Minnetonka, and Ronald Edberg, 58, of Brooklyn Center. Two other people remained at the hospital, one in serious condition and one critical condition. Four of the five men killed suffered multiple gunshot wounds.

Police received multiple 911 calls from inside the business during the attack, which Dolan described as "a hellish time." When officers arrived, they heard no shots but found some evidence people had tried to fight back, Dolan said. He declined to elaborate.

Police initially said Engeldinger was fired in the morning, then returned in the afternoon. But police revised their account later Friday, saying they were piecing together chaotic events from multiple witnesses and that no one saw the shooting from start to finish.

Capt. Amelia Huffman said it appears Engeldinger got a letter of reprimand in the mail, came into the office Thursday afternoon and was then terminated.

"This had been an ongoing employee situation, which culminated in termination in the afternoon," Huffman said. "From the best we can tell, the incident started right after Mr. Engeldinger had been fired."

She said there was a struggle in the office and shots were fired, and

employees elsewhere in the building heard gunshots. "And Mr. Engeldinger left the back office area and fired additional shots throughout the building," she said.

There were more than 20 people in the building at the time.

Dolan described Accent Signage System, a business that includes both offices and manufacturing, as a large building with many rooms branching off to the sides. There was no security and it took tactical units a long time to conduct a thorough search. They found two people hiding "a very long time" after the attack began, Dolan said.

Engeldinger's body was found in the basement, he said.

Sue Abderholden, executive director of the National Alliance on Mental Illness' Minnesota chapter, said Engeldinger's family had sought help from the group two years ago, with his parents taking a 12-week course on recognizing and dealing with mental illness.

She said their concerns were "much more centered around paranoid thoughts. No violence or anything like that." The Engeldingers were not able to convince Andrew to seek treatment, she said.

Andrew Engeldinger's uncle, Joe Engeldinger of New Germany, Minn., called his nephew a "good kid" who seemed normal and well-adjusted until about two years ago when he broke off family contact.

"When I would see his family, I would ask them about Andy and nobody could ever tell me anything," Joe Engeldinger said.

Joe Engeldinger, a professional handyman, said his nephew lived with him for a time in the early 1990s shortly after graduating high school, and worked for him helping to renovate old houses.

"He was a good worker. I never didn't trust him with anything," Joe Engeldinger said.

Chuck and Carolyn Engeldinger raised Andrew and his two siblings in Richfield, a suburb directly south of Minneapolis, according to Joe Engeldinger. He said his nephew was excited early in the last decade when he bought his first house — the modest bungalow in south Minneapolis that police raided late Thursday night, hours after the shooting.

Neighbor Thomas Pitheon said he sometimes exchanged greetings with the man he knew as Andrew but who rarely made much of an impression.

"We just said hi, how you doing, that sort of thing," Pitheon said Friday. "He seemed like an average guy."

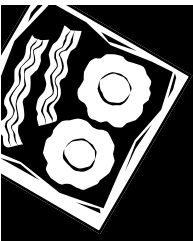
Pitheon said he "put two and two together" Thursday night after hearing about the shooting on the radio, then arriving home after dark to find "about a dozen" SWAT teams swarming around Engeldinger's house.

Joe Engeldinger said Andrew's immediate family were having a "horrible time" since learning what happened. He said they were as befuddled as anyone about why he withdrew from loved ones.

The phone line apparently belonging to Engeldinger's parents was not working Friday. His siblings, who also appear to live in the Twin Cities, did not answer phone calls or respond to messages through social media.

"I can only assume there was some kind of mental break there," Joe Engeldinger said. "He wasn't a monster. He wasn't. He was a real good kid, a real good person. He had a real good heart. I don't know what made all this transpire. Hopefully the truth will come out, and won't get twisted into some demented thing."

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