Plant's security questioned after murder

By Jonas Breaux
Staff Writer

ABBEVILLE – Officials with Fruit of the Loom, both locally and at the company’s Kentucky headquarters, aren’t commenting on an incident at a factory here Tuesday in which a 31-year-old female employee was shot and killed.

The Advertiser attempted to contact the manager of the Abbeville plant Thursday but was told that “no information” was being released.

Pam Blankenship, director of communications at the company’s home office in Bowling Green, Ky., said, “All I can say is that we are cooperating with local police in their investigation.”

Blankenship refused to answer questions about plant security and how employees at the Abbeville factory are dealing with the Valentine’s Day tragedy.

Abbeville Police Chief Mike Hardy said he provided additional security at the factory on Wednesday and Thursday mornings in case curious spectators attempted to get too close to the facility.

Hardy did say that crisis counselors were available Thursday to talk to co-workers of Elaine Leday. She was killed when her estranged boyfriend allegedly entered the plant around 3 p.m. on Tuesday, pulled her into a small office and shot her four times.

Leday, the mother of four children ranging in age from 5 to 12, died from wounds she sustained in the neck and torso.

Kerry Ledet, 27, of St. Martinville, Leday’s estranged boyfriend, has been charged with second-degree murder and aggravated assault. Ledet fled the scene in a pickup truck driven by Paul Etienne of St. Martinville.

Leday was captured in a sugarcane field between Erath and Delcambre after holding police at bay for hours by threatening to commit suicide.

Hardy said Ledet and Etienne had been fishing together on the afternoon of the shooting when Ledet allegedly asked Etienne to give him a ride to the Abbeville factory. Etienne has been charged with being a principal to second-degree murder.

According to Hardy, Leday and Ledet had been living together but had split up recently.

“We understand that police had been called to their home several times for domestic problems but we don’t have any further details on that,” Hardy said.

Hardy said his department completed approximately 99 percent of its investigation at the factory the night of the shooting and that investigators were in the process of interviewing 12-15 witnesses.

“Little by little people are coming forward with things they’ve remembered,” Hardy said. “But, for the most part, we’ve completed our investigation at the factory.”

Vermilion Parish Sheriff Ray LeMaire said Hubert Trouhan, chief of field operations, and the Rev. Thomas Voorhies, a Catholic priest from Delcambre, spent more than three hours in the sugarcane field with Ledet trying to get him to turn himself in to authorities.

“He (Trouhan) and the priest talked to him nonstop to try and prevent him from harming himself or others,” LeMaire said. “At one point they all held hands and had a little prayer session.”

Trouhan said he did not know what to expect when he got word of the standoff in the sugarcane field.

“I really didn’t know what I was going to say when I got there,” Trouhan said. “I just tried to keep a clear mind and deal with the situation spontaneously.”