

Judge's brother held without bail in deaths of sister and brother-in-law

BY LAUREN FITZPATRICK

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lfitzpatrick@suntimes.com

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A brother of a Cook County judge was ordered held without bail Wednesday on charges he killed his sister and her husband, who were found dead in a home in Country Club Hills over the weekend.

Kenneth Rhodes, 50, who was living with the couple, was charged with murdering Nathaniel Bracy, 64, and Pauline Betts-Bracy, 54, who were found shot to death in the 19300 block of South Oakwood Avenue in Country Club Hills, authorities said.

The shootings Friday night followed a dispute in which Rhodes and Betts-Bracy argued over who owned the condominium in which they lived, Country Club Hills Mayor Dwight Welch said. Earlier in the day, the couple had filed a police report over a domestic dispute involving Rhodes.

Rhodes threatened to kill his sister, Assistant State's Attorney Jamie Santini said, and after the dispute Rhodes was heard saying on his cell phone by the person who picked him up, "If I can't have this house no one can."

Then he went to a home in Maywood to retrieve a Smith & Wesson .357-caliber revolver he kept there, Santini said. When he returned the gun later that night, he told a witness, "I got two bodies on it," Santini told the judge.

Assistant Public Defender Caroline G. Glennon asked the judge to appoint a private attorney for Rhodes, a Proviso East High School graduate and unemployed father of five adult children. She did not explain why.

Rhodes is the brother of Cook County Judge James L. Rhodes, who presides at the Markham courthouse, Welch said. He also is Betts-Bracy's brother, Welch said.

Judge Jackie Portman ordered Kenneth Rhodes, a convicted felon with a long criminal history, held without bail Wednesday during a hearing at the Cook County Criminal Courts Building in Chicago.

He was arrested Saturday in Chicago. His clothes were confiscated for forensic testing, so he appeared in a light blue paper jumpsuit. Rhodes only spoke to tell the judge his name, and to confirm he did not want to be questioned any more without his attorney.

Rhodes' criminal troubles date back to at least 1984, while he was living in Maywood. He's been arrested numerous times on drug charges and has convictions from the mid-1980s and early 1990s for battery. He was charged with two counts of murder in 1995, but the charges were dropped in 1998 around the time he was sentenced in federal court to 13 years in prison on a 1994 arson case.

Then he was arrested in December 2007 for possession of cocaine and sentenced in September 2008 to time in the Cook County Jail, records show. He was arrested in January 2008 for possession of heroin and resisting a peace officer and pleaded guilty in September 2008 to possession of a controlled substance.

In May 2010, he was sentenced to a year of conditional discharge and three days of community service for an April 2010 battery charge. He finished his conditional discharge satisfactorily on May 25, 2011, court records show.

Autopsies performed Saturday found the Bracys each suffered multiple gunshot wounds, according to the medical examiner's office.