

Slain San Bernardino marijuana shop guard was set to work at Oscars

By Beatriz Valenzuela and Doug Saunders

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SAN BERNARDINO >> Anthony Pineda had a love of people and a zest for life. The 25-year-old Rowland Heights man was an ocean lifeguard for Huntington Beach, an avid water polo player and enthusiast, and on Sunday he was scheduled to work at the Academy Awards.

But those plans were shattered when Pineda, working as a security officer at a San Bernardino marijuana dispensary, was shot and killed Monday night.

“This is a huge tragedy,” said Lt. Mike Beuerlein with the Marine Safety Division of Huntington Beach, where Pineda worked as an ocean lifeguard. He saved a number of lives working from the lifeguard tower,” Beuerlein said of Pineda.

Although the Rowland Heights man had not worked as a lifeguard for at least two years, Beuerlein remembered the well-mannered and energetic man, saying there were several times Pineda pulled distressed swimmers caught in riptides or administered first aid to people on the beach.

Pineda also worked as a courier for Foundation Laboratory in Pomona. A representative for the company who didn't want to be identified said Pineda was a smart, articulate and eager person with a lot of plans for the future. “He was very ambitious. I remember he started a non-profit, or talked about starting one, to help get kids into water polo,” the man said. “This is such a terrible thing.”

In 2011, when the Ontario High School graduate was only 21, he founded WaterPolo4Life, according to Pineda's LinkedIn and Facebook page. The organization's mission is reportedly “to fund and develop waterpolo programs and players.” One of the last posts made to the page was last summer.

Shortly before 10 p.m. Monday, two gunmen, described only as two black males, stormed into a marijuana dispensary in the strip mall at 2844 W. Rialto Avenue, near Pepper Avenue. The men managed to force their way into the rear portion of the business where the “products” were located, Lt. Rich Lawhead said.

It's unclear what happened directly before the shooting occurred, but officials believe that Pineda managed to fire back possibly striking one of the would-be robbers. Detectives believe the wounded gunman may have been critically shot from the amount of blood loss left at the scene.

Police had to break down the front door to get to Pineda, who was found alone in the rear of the dispensary, officials said. Pineda was pronounced dead inside.

It's unclear if the dispensary workers locked Pineda inside or if the security door automatically locked after everyone ran outside, however, police say the employees were not cooperating with officers. It's also not clear if anything was taken from the location.

Pineda's credentials for the upcoming Academy Awards were still in his car outside the dispensary Tuesday morning along with a badge for Security Industry Specialists, Inc., a security firm based out of Culver City.

"We at Security Industry Specialists, Inc. were saddened to learn of the death of Anthony V. Pineda," said Tom P. Seltz, president and CFO of the security firm in a written statement. "Our condolences go out to Mr. Pineda's family and friends."

Pineda was recently hired by the firm, however, the dispensary was not an SIS client, Seltz said.

Family members remained outside the dispensary waiting for information on the fatal shooting. A woman cried out, "Tony!" as the coroner left with Pineda's body. A coroner's investigator handed off the victim's camouflage-colored back pack to the grieving woman.

A man who lives in the area was surprised to learn there was a dispensary operating in the strip mall, and another said some people were worried about the type of clientele the dispensary could bring to the area. "There's a pizza shop right there," said the man who didn't want to be identified. "There are families here. You would always see people coming in and out."

The man said he thought this dispensary was at one time located in another portion of the strip mall. "It closed, and I guess it just moved over here," he said. "That one had a lot of people in there, too. Mostly young people."

All marijuana dispensaries are illegal in the city of San Bernardino, Lawhead said, adding that there are about 45 clandestine businesses operating illegally in the city. The marijuana dispensary was located in what looks from the outside to be an eyebrow-threading business. The phone number on the dispensary's door still links back to the defunct beauty business.