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REGISTER CORRESPONDENT

Hiawatha, Ia. — Police arrested a 21-year-old man Tuesday in the death of a woman he had reportedly lived with.

Christopher Joseph Wheeler of Hiawatha was charged with first-degree murder in the death this week of Shelley Kay Razor-Markwell, 36, a mother of three.

Wheeler was arrested at St. Luke's Hospital after the victim's missing car, a 1988 light blue Plymouth Sundance, was spotted in the area. Police said a witness saw the suspect leave Razor-Markwell's vehicle Monday and called authorities.

They found Razor-Markwell at 1 p.m. that day.

Police Chief Richard Pierce said the victim was not shot or stabbed. An autopsy was scheduled.

"We are tying some loose ends and trying to determine motive," Pierce said.

He estimated the time of death as late Sunday or early Monday.

The victim, police say, was by herself in the apartment. Her three children, two boys and a girl, range in age from 2 to 13.

"The kids are with their fathers, and they are all very shook up," Pierce said.

Chelle Bennett, 18, and her

friend Ashley Schafer, 18, saw Razor-Markwell about 6 p.m. Sunday when they went to return a vacuum cleaner.

"Shelley was very, very good about everything, and very quiet," Bennett said. "The last thing she said to me was, 'Keep on trucking.'"



Neighbors say Razor-Markwell rarely had guests,

although a cousin occasionally stopped there.

Hiawatha is a city of 5,000 people, north of Cedar Rapids. Pierce, who has been on the police force for 24 years, said Razor-Markwell's death was his second homicide investigation.

"Any time somebody gets murdered, especially a female and a single mother, we all become concerned with our safety and well-being," said Jeff Tourdot, 26, a Hiawatha resident. "It's a very nice community, and things like this do not happen here."

Wheeler was unemployed, police said. He had reportedly checked himself into the hospital.

Hiawatha police, Linn County sheriff's deputies, the Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation and other agencies continue the investigation.

Woman found dead had been strangled

A Hiawatha woman found dead in her apartment Monday afternoon died of asphyxiation by strangulation, according to a preliminary autopsy report.

Christopher Joseph Wheeler, 21, was charged in the death Shelley Razor-Markwell, 36, a mother of three. Wheeler lived with Razor-Markwell.