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Infant dies alone in car

Mom reportedly thought she'd left boy at day care

By Drake Witham

Staff Writer

A 5-month-old baby was found dead in a North Dallas parking lot after his mother left him alone in a hot car for nearly five hours Wednesday, police said.

The body of Ethan Fletcher was found about 3 p.m. at the Lincoln Park shopping mall, across the street from NorthPark Center.

His mother, a 24-year-old waitress at The Cheesecake Factory restaurant in the Lincoln Park mall, arrived for work about 10:30 a.m.

The mother, a Plano woman whose name was not disclosed, was questioned and released by Dallas police Wednesday evening and could face charges of criminally negligent homicide, said Deputy Chief Alfredo G. Saldana.

"She said she thought she dropped ... [the child] off at day care," he said.

After the medical examiner rules on the cause of death,

Criminal charges under consideration

the case will be presented to the district attorney's office, he said.

The mother could not be reached for comment, but the child's grandmother said her daughter was a single mother who did everything she could to care for the child.

"We are so devastated. We're so hurt. It was an accident," she said. "My daughter is so devastated. This baby was everything to her. She will never be the same. She loved this baby so much."

Tony Fraga, an employee of a spa next door to the restaurant, was in front of the mall when the baby was found.

"I heard these two bloodcurdling screams and ran over to see

"You don't think you could forget a baby, but we don't know the extenuating circumstances."

— Tony Fraga, who works near where the baby's body was found

what the problem was," he said. "I saw the baby in the car and tried to help."

He said the child was strapped into a car seat. He said that when he tried to remove the infant from the seat, he knew that the child was dead because his arm was stiff. He said he tried to perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation after he called 911 from a cell phone.

"My heart goes out to ... [the mother]; she just lost a child," Mr. Fraga said. "You don't think you

could forget a baby, but we don't know the extenuating circumstances."

Wednesday's high temperature was 73 degrees, one of the warmest days this year, said Lonnie King, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service.

"The temperature in that car could easily rise to 100 degrees," he said. "The problem is the sunlight is coming in through the windows, and the car can't radiate the heat back outside, so the heat just builds up in there."

"It's like a greenhouse. Within 20 or 30 minutes, it would be noticeably warmer than the outside temperature, even on a day like today when it is in the 70s."

Employees of The Cheesecake Factory declined to comment Wednesday on the infant's death or his mother's employment record.

Police said the woman has no other children and has not had any dealings with Child Protective Services.

"It's a tragic example of how quickly these things can happen," Chief Saldana said. "It's a violation of the law to leave your child unattended for even five minutes."

Staff writer Tiara Ellis contributed to this report.