

BARBARA EDEN is devastated by the mysterious death of her only child, who she thought had beaten his drug and booze habit when tragedy struck.

His friends are wondering how he had slipped back into his destructive lifestyle.

On June 25, the lifeless body of 30-year-old Matthew Ansara, Barbara's son with actor Michael Ansara, was found inside his pickup truck parked at a gas station 10 miles east of downtown Los Angeles. A bottle of alcohol was at his feet.

Although police later denied it, there were reports that a syringe was found in his arm.

Matthew's death came as a complete shock to us," Eden's husband Jon Eicholtz tells GLOBE. "Barbara's taking it very hard."

Eden, the legendary star of TV's *I*

BARBARA EDEN SON'S DEATH SHROUDED IN MYSTERY



Strapping Matthew and his mother Barbara Eden. (Inset) She nuzzles Matthew's dad and her then-hubby, actor Michael Ansara in 1964

Friends fear he slipped back into drug hell



Ansara was found dead in his truck, parked in this gas station in Monrovia, Calif.

Eden's friend Jeannie was convinced that Matthew was finally clean and sober after spending most of his life battling his addictions.

Barbara really believed that Matthew had made it through all his torment and freed himself of his demons," confides a source close to the 60-year-old actress. "But his friends would've been sucked back in."

When the postmortem tests are done, his pals believe they'll prove that Matthew couldn't beat his demons." Matthew had bounced in and out of rehab nine times in one five-year period, but his devoted mom was always there for him.

Barbara just never gave up on her son, reveals a friend.

Tom Loy of Monrovia, the

town where the gas station is located, says, "Ansara was found lifeless and alone. There was no evidence or visible indications of trauma or any struggle. There does not appear to be any foul play."

Matthew was born to Eden and Ansara, a Syrian-born character actor best known for playing Cochise in the '50s series *Broken Arrow*, four years before their 1972 divorce.

"Michael is also beside himself with grief," a friend of the actor tells GLOBE. "He and Barbara haven't spoken yet because

they're both still in shock."

During one rehab stint, Matthew admitted to using heroin at age 14, robbing people to support his habit and getting busted and jailed several times.

Eden sought expert advice to help her son, attended AA meetings with him and campaigned against drugs. But for years she was powerless to help Matthew kick his habit.

"Eventually, Barbara began to

dread every late-night phone call, fearing that Matt would be in some kind of trouble - or worse," reveals an insider.

Finally, in the last few years, appeared Matthew had turned the corner. Just a year ago, Eden told GLOBE, "I've had a lot of problems with him, but he's clean and focused now and doing great."

Matthew was doing movie and TV auditions and working out four hours a day. At 6-foot-3 and 280 pounds, he had an awesome build and could bench-press 500 pounds.

The aspiring actor was living with his fiancée Leanna Green in Covington and his mom was in her glory helping to plan their Sept. 1 wedding.

Eden's close pal Julie Newmar, who played Catwoman on the '60s TV show *Batman*, tells GLOBE, "I remember how Barbara would speak about how passionately she

loved her son. She would just beam when she talked about him."

But Eden often wondered what she could have done to raise her son differently, the insider confides.

"She once said, 'I've asked myself a million times if I was something I did wrong. Maybe

she should have stayed home more and cut back on the work,'" the source reveals. "I'll always remember her telling me, 'Matt is my greatest joy and my greatest sorrow.'"

- ROBIN MIZRAHI and PETE TRUJILLO

