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QUEENS MAN SENTENCED FOR SETTING FIRE TO WHITESTONE DINER

Receives Up To 14 Years In Prison

Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown today announced that a 42-year-old Whitestone man has been sentenced for setting a fire that virtually destroyed a landmark neighborhood diner and surrounding stores.

District Attorney Brown said, "The defendant has pleaded guilty to set a devastating fire that destroyed a popular business and caused extensive damage to neighboring stores. The fire could easily have caused serious injuries or death to firefighters charged with fighting the blaze or others who may have been inside or around the building. This lengthy prison sentence is more than warranted. "

District Attorney Brown identified the defendant as Michael P. Trantel, 42, of 15-29 159th Street in Whitestone. Trantel pleaded guilty to third-degree arson last month before Acting Queens Supreme Court Justice James Griffin, who today sentenced the defendant to seven to fourteen years in state prison. Trantel has been held without bail since his arrest in November 2008.

According to District Attorney Brown, the defendant admitted that he broke into the Lollipops Diner, located at 153-31 Cross Island Parkway North, at about 1:00 a.m. on November 2, 2008, and that after stealing some cigarettes and a lighter, he set a bag of Halloween candy on fire. The diner was closed for business at the time of the fire.

District Attorney Brown said that surveillance video showed the defendant outside the diner, as well as entering from the front of the diner and exiting from the rear, according to court papers. The fire caused extensive smoke, flame and water damage to the entire diner.

District Attorney Brown said that the defendant was arrested by fire marshals assigned to the New York City Fire Department's Bureau of Fire Investigations, Citywide North Command, and Special Investigation Unit. The cause of the fire was investigated by the Joint Arson Task Force, which included members of the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, New York Field Division; the Arson and Explosion Squad of the New York City Police Department; and the Special Investigations Unit of the Bureau of Fire Investigation of the New York City Fire Department.

Assistant District Attorney David Chen, of the District Attorney's Economic Crimes Bureau, prosecuted the case, under the supervision of Assistant District Attorneys Gregory C. Pavlides, Bureau Chief, and Christina Hanophy, Deputy Bureau Chief, and the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Peter A. Crusco and Deputy Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Linda M. Cantoni.

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Note to Editors: Press release e-version posted at www.queensda.org