



BCPO News

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Man Charged in Browns Mills House Fire That Claimed Two Lives

Burlington County Prosecutor Scott Coffina and Pemberton Township Police Chief David H. Jantas announced that a 59-year-old man was charged today with causing a house fire that resulted in the deaths of his elderly mother and her companion earlier this week in the Browns Mills section of Pemberton Township.

Kurt Smith, who lived at the residence in the 500 block of Willow Boulevard, was charged with two counts of Aggravated Manslaughter (First Degree), and one count of Arson (Third Degree).

Smith was served with the charges at Temple University Hospital in Philadelphia, where he had been flown following the October 16 fire and treated for smoke inhalation. Upon being discharged, Smith will be taken into custody by Philadelphia authorities. An extradition proceeding will be held to authorize his return to New Jersey.

The investigation revealed that Smith was in the garage of the home at approximately 8:30 p.m. with two other people when he acted in a reckless manner and ignited flammable material with a cigarette lighter. He unsuccessfully tried to extinguish the blaze, which quickly spread once the garage door was opened.

The fire killed his mother, Lore Smith, 92, who was pronounced dead at Lourdes Emergency Department at Deborah Hospital in Pemberton Township. Her companion, George Pikunis, also 92, was pronounced dead at the scene.

Autopsies performed by Burlington County Medical Examiner Dr. Ian Hood concluded the cause of death in each instance was smoke and soot inhalation, along with thermal burns.

Smith will be prosecuted by Assistant Prosecutor Bob VanGilst, supervisor of the BCPO Major Crimes Unit, Violent Crimes Section. The investigation is being conducted by the Burlington County Prosecutor's Office, the Pemberton Township Police Department, and the Burlington County Fire Marshal's Office. The lead investigators are BCPO Detective Erica Ridge and Pemberton Township Detective Tom Lucas.

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