



BCPO News

Scott A. Coffina, Prosecutor

Philip S. Aronow
First Assistant Prosecutor

Darren N. Anderson
Chief of Detectives



Joel Bewley
BCPO Public Information Officer
Desk: 609-265-5777
Cell: 609-820-4407
jbewley@co.burlington.nj.us

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Browns Mills Man Found Guilty of House Fire That Claimed Two Lives

Burlington County Prosecutor Scott Coffina announced that a 62-year-old man was found guilty of causing the deaths of his elderly mother and her companion who perished in a house fire in October 2018 in the Browns Mills section of Pemberton Township.

Kurt Smith, who lived at the residence in the 500 block of Willow Boulevard, was convicted by a jury on two counts of Reckless Manslaughter (Second Degree). The verdict was returned October 26 following approximately 10 hours of deliberation over two days.

The Hon. Christopher J. Garrenger, J.S.C., scheduled sentencing for January 7. Smith has been lodged in the Burlington County Jail in Mount Holly since his arrest a few days after the fire.

Smith was accused of igniting flammable material with a cigarette lighter in the garage of the residence, then unsuccessfully attempting to extinguish the blaze.

In addition to the homicides, Smith was charged with arson. The jury was unable to come to a verdict on the arson charge.

The fire killed his mother, Lore Smith, 92, who was pronounced dead at a nearby hospital. 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 was prosecuted by Assistant Prosecutor Joseph Remy and Assistant Prosecutor Bob Van Gilst, supervisor of the BCPO Major Crimes Unit, Violent Crimes Section. The investigation was conducted by the Burlington County Prosecutor's Office, the Pemberton Township Police Department, and the Burlington County Fire Marshal's Office. The lead investigators were BCPO Detective Erica Ridge and Pemberton Township Detective Tom Lucas.

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