



# BCPO News

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## **Browns Mills Man Sentenced to 11 Years in Prison for House Fire That Claimed Two Lives**

Burlington County Prosecutor Scott Coffina announced that a 63-year-old man who was found guilty of causing the deaths of his elderly mother and her companion in a 2018 Browns Mills house fire was sentenced today to 11 years in New Jersey state prison.

The Hon. Christopher J. Garrenger, J.S.C., handed down the sentence against Kurt Smith in Superior Court in Mount Holly. Smith must serve 85 percent of the sentence before becoming eligible for parole.

Smith, who lived at the residence in the 500 block of Willow Boulevard, was convicted in October 2021 on two counts of Reckless Manslaughter (Second Degree). Judge Garrenger sentenced Smith to 11 years on each count, to run concurrently.

The verdict was returned following approximately 10 hours of deliberation over two days. The jury was unable to come to a verdict on an arson charge against Smith.

Smith is accused of igniting flammable material with a cigarette lighter in the garage of the residence on October 16, 2018, then unsuccessfully attempting to extinguish the blaze.

The fire killed his mother, Lore Smith, and her companion, George Pikunis, both 92.

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.

It was noted during today's proceeding that Smith has been arrested 187 times and has 16 felony convictions.

Smith was prosecuted by Assistant Prosecutor Joseph Remy, supervisor of the BCPO Financial Crimes Unit, and Assistant Prosecutor Bob Van Gilst, supervisor of the BCPO Major Crimes Unit. 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 Sergeant Erica Ridge and Pemberton Township Sergeant Tom Lucas.

**END**