

Pierce County

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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TEEN RECIEVES MAXIMUM SENTENCE FOR POINT DEFIANCE ARSON

TACOMA, WA - - Today a 16-year-old from Tacoma was sentenced to 142 to 189 weeks in the Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration, the maximum range, for the burning of the Point Defiance Park Pagoda on April 15, 2011. The damages and repair costs to the historic structure total approximately \$2.5 million. The teen, who was 15 years old at the time of the incidents, was implicated in a series of fires set at Point Defiance over a period of days. He pled guilty to Arson in the First Degree, Attempted Arson in the First Degree, Arson in the Second Degree, and Reckless Burning in the First Degree, as well as additional felony counts related to an earlier Pagoda break-in and damage to neighborhood vehicles.

“This dangerous arson was quickly solved thanks to proactive police work by the Ruston Police Department and the perpetrator was brought to justice thanks to first rate investigative work by the Tacoma Police Department,” Prosecutor Mark Lindquist said. “Tacoma Fire fighters risked their lives attempting to save the historic Pagoda, and the effort to rebuild this landmark in our community is already underway.”

The fire was reported by a Metro Parks employee who called 9-1-1 in the early morning hours of April 15. Tacoma Fire responded and extinguished the fire, which appeared to be intentionally set in the basement of the structure. Glass panels from the basement windows had been removed at the same point of entry from an April 6 burglary where paint was strewn around a room, plants and file cabinets were knocked over and windows broken, causing an estimated \$1,000 in damages.

The suspect was arrested on April 20 when a Ruston Police Officer contacted a juvenile male riding a bike near Point Defiance Park at 1:00 a.m. The juvenile, later identified as the perpetrator, was wearing gardening gloves and carrying a backpack that contained a one gallon plastic can full of gasoline. A pat down of the juvenile revealed a cell phone and a box of wooden matches.

Tacoma Police obtained a search warrant for the cell phone. Detectives found hundreds of text messages on the phone, many of which referred to the fires at Point Defiance. A message sent from the phone on April 6 after midnight stated, “Hey...I broke into a building.” There were additional messages about getting caught and going to jail.

Deputy Prosecutor Fred Wist, Chief Deputy of the Juvenile Division, prosecuted the case.

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