



Pierce County

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CHARGES FILED IN POINT DEFIANCE ARSON

Today a 15-year-old boy from Tacoma was charged with Arson in the First Degree for the April 15 burning of the Point Defiance Park Pagoda, which caused more than \$500,000 in damages to the historic structure. The teen was also charged with Unlawful Possession of an Incendiary Device, Burglary in the Second Degree and Malicious Mischief in the Second Degree for an earlier Pagoda break-in and setting fires in garbage cans around the park.

The fire to the Pagoda 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. Paint was strewn around a room, plants and file cabinets were knocked over and windows broken, causing an estimated \$1,000 in damages.

“The Pagoda is an important landmark in our community,” Prosecutor Mark Lindquist said. “I commend the Ruston and Tacoma Police Departments for smart police work and rapid apprehension of the suspect.”

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 in the morning. The juvenile, later identified as the respondent, 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 apparently 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,” and “I also dumped a can of paint on the ground.” On April 14, a message was sent from the phone stating, “Hey...we should start a fire in that 1 building I told u about.” Messages sent on April 15 included, “Look up Seattle times pagota fire,” and “No I believe it’s just heaving damaged.” These were followed by messages about getting caught and going to jail.

Deputy Prosecutor Fred Wist, Chief Deputy of the Juvenile Division, is handling the case. The juvenile is being held in custody at Remann Hall. Criminal charges are only allegations. A person is presumed innocent unless and until he or she is proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

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