

Ex-Mental Patient Charged With Arson In Waterbury Fire

By BETH HOLTZMAN
Times Argus Staff

WATERBURY — A former Vermont State Hospital patient was scheduled to be arraigned today on arson charges for allegedly starting a fire Tuesday that leveled a Waterbury community care home in which he sometimes lived.

Gary L. Condrick, 28, of Waterbury, was taken to the Chittenden County Correctional Center in South Burlington pending arraignment today in Vermont District Court in Barre. Bail was set at \$25,000.

No one was injured in the blaze, which authorities say started at about 1:30 p.m. in a rear barn of the 131 South Main Street house, located in a densely populated part of Waterbury village.

The 15 residents of the community care home, operated by Rachel Cubit, have been placed in other group homes by Washington County Mental Health, Waterbury Police Chief Wayne Sourdiff said today.

According to police reports, Condrick allegedly approached Chief Sourdiff, who was directing traffic near the fire, and told him he had started the fire because he was "mad" at Cubit.

Condrick had been living on and off with Cubit, or her daughter, Pamela Perry, since being released from the State Hospital roughly two years ago, Sourdiff said. Condrick was angry with Cubit because of a disagreement over the sale of a bicycle, Sourdiff said.

"He had been a patient at the State Hospital for years and had been back and forth between (Cubit's) and her daughter's

home," Sourdiff said.

Sourdiff said that Condrick allegedly "crumpled up some papers and ignited them with a lighter. There was hay in the barn and it caught." Police and firefighters estimate that \$80,000 of damage was done to the house and barn.

"It's very fortunate that the state police . . . were on the scene so fast to help evacuate people from the surrounding homes and to help the fire department put out the fire," Sourdiff said.

Waterbury Village firefighters were at the scene of a car accident on I-89 when the fire alarm sounded, authorities said. State Police recruits, who were in a nearby classroom on their second day of instruction, as well as Waterbury and Middlesex firefighters helped put out the blaze.

In early July, simple assault and lewd and lascivious conduct charges against Condrick were dropped by the Washington County State's Attorney's office after Judge Alan W. Cook granted an order of non-hospitalization for Condrick, according to court records.

The order contained a number of conditions, including that Condrick reside with Perry, take all prescribed medications, and see mental health counselors regularly.

The two charges stemmed from a March 6 incident in which he allegedly attacked Perry and another woman at Perry's home.

According to court records, the county prosecutor and Condrick's attorney agreed on May 12 to a stipulation that Condrick was not competent to stand trial.



Photo by Sandy Macys

Arson Alleged

A Duxbury man was in custody today pending his arraignment on an arson charge in connection with a fire that destroyed a community care home in Waterbury Tuesday. This photo shows firefighters trying to bring the blaze under control. No one was hurt. Story, page 11.

Arson Suspect Back In Hospital

By BETH HOLTZMAN
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BARRE — Judge Alan W. Cook on Wednesday ordered a Duxbury man accused of setting fire to a Waterbury building Tuesday to undergo a psychiatric evaluation at the Vermont State Hospital.

Gary L. Condrick, 28, remained in state custody for lack of \$25,000 bail after pleading innocent to charges of first degree arson in connection with a fire that swept through a South Main Street community care home Tuesday. No one was injured in the blaze.

Condrick, a former Vermont State Hospital patient, was found to be incompetent to stand trial earlier this year when he was accused of simple assault and lewd and lascivious conduct. According to authorities, Condrick has a long history of mental il-

ness and developmental disabilities that date back to his early childhood.

"We know from past experience that Mr. Condrick is a gentleman who has a history of emotional disability and has been in the state mental health system for the majority of his life," Cook said. "Therefore, it would seem to me . . . that the first order of business is a psychiatric evaluation for both competency and sanity."

Competency and sanity are two separate legal terms. Competency is based on an evaluation of the defendant's ability to understand the charges against him or her, the role of the trial, judge and jury, and to assist his or her attorney in the preparation of a defense.

Sanity refers to the mental state of the defendant at the time of the offense.

Cook rejected county prosecutor Robert Manley's request that Condrick be sent to a correctional facility rather than the hospital for a "breath-catching period of a couple of weeks." Manley told the judge that Vermont mental health officials are concerned about Condrick's safety at the hospital because the alleged victim of the fire, Rachel Cubit, was a former worker at the state hospital.

Cook said he did not want to send a "deinstitutionalized, mentally disabled person to prison."

Condrick's criminal record dates back to 1982, when he was accused of unlawful mischief. Eventually, those charges, like the 1987 simple assault and lewd and lascivious conduct charges, were dismissed without prejudice.