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**D.A. BROWN: QUEENS WOMAN CHARGED WITH MURDER AND ARSON
IN FATAL FOUR-ALARM FIRE THAT ROARED THROUGH FIVE JAMAICA RESIDENCES**

Elderly Man and Son's Girlfriend Killed in Blaze; Defendant Faces Up to Life In Prison

Queens District Attorney Richard A. Brown announced today that a 34-year-old woman has been charged with murder and arson for deliberately setting fire to a two-story Jamaica apartment house last July. The fire, which spread quickly down the block, destroyed four adjoining buildings and killed two individuals. The incident occurred on the day the defendant's friend, a tenant in the building, was moving out.

District Attorney Brown said, "In the events leading up to last summer's fire that claimed two lives and left many people homeless, it is alleged that the defendant first assisted a friend with removing her personal belongings from the building before setting fire to the property – fully knowing that there were people inside the adjoining buildings. Even later, as she stood outside the house and saw smoke coming from the building next door, instead of offering help she allegedly drove away from the scene."

The District Attorney identified the defendant as Monique Benn, 34, of 218-12 141st Avenue in Queens. She is charged with four counts of second-degree murder, one count of third-degree arson, one count of first-degree reckless endangerment and four counts of fourth-degree arson. The defendant, who faces up to 25 years to life in prison if convicted, is expected to be arraigned later today in Queens Criminal Court.

The District Attorney said that the criminal complaint charges that, on the evening of July 18, 2006, the defendant intentionally set fire to 103-15 169th Street, a two-story attached building. The fire then allegedly spread to four adjoining buildings – 103-13, 103-17, 103-19 and 103-21 – which were all occupied and resulted in the death of James Crocker, 83, and Alexandria Roberts, 46, who were both in 103-17 169th Street.

The investigation was conducted by Fire Marshal Stephen Calcutti, of the New York City Fire Department and Detective John P. Kissane, of the NYPD's 103 Detective Squad.

Assistant District Attorney Marissa B. Gillespie, of the District Attorney Brown's Homicide Investigations Bureau, is prosecuting the case under the supervision of Assistant District Attorneys Peter T. Reese, Bureau Chief, Peter J. McCormack III, Deputy Bureau Chief, and Richard B. Schaeffer, Supervisor, and the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for Major Crimes Charles A. Testagrossa and Deputy Executive Assistant District Attorney for Major Crimes Daniel A. Saunders.

It should be noted that a criminal complaint is merely an accusation and that a defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

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Note to Editors: Press release e-version posted at www.queensda.org.