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WOMAN CHARGED WITH ARSON AND ASSAULT FOR SETTING FIRE AT THREE LOCATIONS IN MASPETH, THROWING A BRICK THROUGH A STOREFRONT WINDOW AND INJURING TWO

Defendant Allegedly Set Fire to Chinese Restaurant; Two Victims in Residential Unit Above Restaurant Injured Escaping Flames; Faces up to 25 years, if Convicted

Queens District Attorney Melinda Katz announced that Shaniqua Fort was charged with arson, assault, reckless endangerment and other crimes for allegedly setting fires at several storefront locations along Flushing and Grand Avenues in Maspeth during the evening of April 13. The defendant allegedly started a blaze that destroyed a Chinese restaurant and the apartments above the business, which injured two occupants; set fire to an American flag in front of a funeral home; threw a brick through the window of an insurance office; and tossed an unknown object through the window of a Jewish center and then lit another fire.

DA Katz said: “As alleged, the defendant went on a deliberate fire-setting spree, endangering not only local businesses but countless residents in a quiet residential neighborhood. My office will pursue arson cases with the utmost urgency and do everything in our power to protect Queens communities from this dangerous and destructive crime. I thank the brave FDNY members for their immediate response and the NYPD for quickly apprehending the defendant.”

Fort, 36, of Chicago, was arraigned today on a criminal complaint charging her with arson in the second degree, two counts of arson in the third degree, two counts of assault in the second degree, reckless endangerment in the first degree, criminal mischief in the second degree, two counts of assault in the third degree, three counts of criminal mischief in the fourth degree, two counts of arson in the fifth degree, petit larceny and criminal possession of a weapon in the fourth degree.

Criminal Court Judge Indira Khan remanded the defendant and ordered her to return to court May 13. If convicted, Fort faces up to 25 years in prison.

DA Katz said that, according to the charges and investigation, on April 13, at approximately 9 p.m., Fort approached 888 Chinese Restaurant at 60-92 Flushing Avenue and removed a black trash bag from a trash can in front of the building. She then placed the bag into an alcove leading to an entryway, set it on fire and walked away from the location.

An occupant of a second-floor apartment above the restaurant shattered a window with his arm to climb out and escape the fire. He sustained lacerations, bleeding and substantial pain to his arm. Another victim was inside a second-floor apartment at the location and jumped from the window to avoid being burned. She was transported to a local hospital where she underwent surgery for two broken heels and treatment for a finger fracture, burns to multiple fingers and legs and soot inside of her throat and nose.

Several minutes after allegedly setting the fire at the Chinese restaurant, Fort approached D’Angelo’s Funeral Home at 64-18 Grand Avenue and lit on fire an American flag hanging from the front of the building. She removed a second flag hanging from the front of the location and walked away.

Shortly afterward, Fort allegedly picked up a brick and threw it through the glass window of an Allstate insurance company office located at 65-02 Grand Avenue.

After that, Fort allegedly approached the Maspeth Jewish Center at 66-64 Grand Avenue, picked up an unknown object and threw it at a glass window, shattering it. The defendant then walked toward several objects along the side of the Jewish Center building and lit them on fire. Fort then went through her belongings, grabbed an unknown object and placed it into the fire, causing the fire to grow in intensity.

Fort was apprehended shortly afterward by members of the 104th Police Precinct.

Assistant District Attorney Samantha A. Tighe of the District Attorney's Felony Trials Bureau III is prosecuting the case, under the supervision of Assistant District Attorneys Rachel Buchter, Bureau Chief, Christine McCoy and Courtney Charles, Deputy Chiefs, and under the overall supervision of Executive Assistant District Attorney for the Supreme Court Trial Division Pishoy Yacoub.

Criminal complaints and indictments are accusations. A defendant is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

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