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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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DEARBORN RESIDENT PLEADS GUILTY TO ARSON

A 19-year-old Dearborn resident pleaded guilty today to arson, that is, the malicious destruction, by fire, of The Dollar Store/Smokey Joe's retail store located in a commercial shopping center known as Superior Plaza in Dearborn, Michigan, United States Attorney Stephen J. Murphy announced.

Murphy was joined in the announcement by Valerie J. Goddard, Special Agent in Charge of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF).

Pleading guilty before U.S. District Judge John Corbett O'Meara was Mouhamad Bazzi.

The information presented to the court at the time of the plea showed that The Dollar Store/Smokey Joe's, which leased retail space at 7709 Wyoming, Dearborn, was a business owned by Bazzi's mother and operated by Bazzi and his brother. On January 13, 2006, persons hired by Bazzi went to the store, after hours, and set fire to the building. Bazzi made arrangements to have the doors to the business unlocked allowing easy access to the persons he hired to destroy the building. The fire was deliberately set with the expectation that an insurance carrier would compensate his mother for the business inventory and property destroyed by the fire and for the business interruption. The fire not only destroyed the Bazzi's business, however, but also did extensive damage to the Superior Plaza and other businesses operating at that location.

Under the terms of his plea agreement, Bazzi faces a mandatory minimum 60 months in prison. The date for sentencing will be set by the Court.

Co-defendant Henry Derrick, who previously pleaded guilty in May of 2006, to setting the fire that destroyed the building, is awaiting sentencing. Co-defendant Darren Curtis, who is also charged with arson, is awaiting trial.

United States Attorney Stephen J. Murphy said, "Arson often combines violence and fraud, because it involves both destroying property and defrauding the insurance company. Once the fire is set, the destruction can be difficult to control, however, as we saw in this situation. ATF deserves a lot of credit for solving this case."

Special Agent in Charge Valerie J. Goddard of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco Firearms and Explosives (ATF) in Michigan states, "The crime of arson is one of the most difficult types of cases to solve. Results of our joint investigation sends a message to the public that crimes of violence, such as this case of arson, are not tolerated," Goddard said.

The investigation of this case was conducted by agents of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives with the assistance of the Dearborn Police Department.