



Department of Justice

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FORMER CLUB MANAGER CONVICTED BY JURY IN STRIP CLUB ARSON PLOT

Atlanta, GA - A jury late today convicted BOYD SMITH, 40, of Atlanta, Georgia, on a charge of conspiring to commit an arson at "Club Onyx," an adult entertainment establishment in Atlanta. SMITH was immediately remanded into custody and awaits sentencing. Two other co-defendants were previously convicted and testified against SMITH during the trial, which lasted six days. The jury returned its verdict after only four hours of deliberation.

United States Attorney David E. Nahmias said of the jury's verdict, "Arson is a serious and dangerous offense, whether it involves a day care center or a strip club. This defendant's conspiracy with two other men could have resulted in the deaths of innocent civilians and firefighters. Today's verdict ensures that Smith will join his co-conspirators in prison for a long time."

"Regardless of motive, arson is a crime of violence," said Special Agent in Charge Gregory Gant of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives Atlanta Field Division. "Law enforcement brought to bear all of our resources and expertise in solving this crime. These men should consider themselves lucky that no one was hurt as a result of their deliberate and malicious acts."

FBI Atlanta Special Agent In Charge Greg Jones said of the verdict, "Business owners should not have to fear extreme acts of violence from greedy, lawless competitors. The public rightfully expects such criminals to pay for their violent crimes, and we are pleased to have joined forces with our partners at ATF in bringing these defendants to justice."

According to Nahmias and the evidence presented in court: SMITH conspired with SANDEO PABLO DYSON, 45, of Gainesville, Georgia, and HOWARD "Bit" THROWER, 51, of Alpharetta, Georgia, to burn down Club Onyx, an adult entertainment club that was a direct rival of "Platinum 21," a club then operated by SMITH and THROWER, and where DYSON worked security. The investigation had begun on January 2, 2007, when the ATF and the City of Atlanta Fire Department were called to a

fire at Club Onyx, which is located at 1888 Cheshire Bridge Road in Atlanta. An internal surveillance system that was not destroyed by the blaze showed a male figure moving about the club after it had been locked and alarmed by management. The jury saw video evidence of the individual starting the fire and then hurrying beyond the range of the cameras and out of the building. The owners of Club Onyx spent nearly \$1 million to rebuild and had to keep the club shuttered for over six months.

For several months, investigators were unable to develop any leads on the arson. A break in the case occurred in August and September, 2007, when the ATF and the FBI learned that THROWER was involved in the arson. THROWER, the corporate manager of Platinum 21, worked with SMITH and DYSON to devise a plan to burn Club Onyx, which had recently converted from a predominantly white club to a venue catering to an African-American clientele. The evidence showed that Club Onyx's conversion had an immediate and severe impact on Platinum 21's business and THROWER, SMITH, and DYSON ultimately determined that action was necessary to shut Onyx down so that Platinum 21 would continue to keep its profit levels. The evidence showed that DYSON was paid \$5,000 by SMITH and THROWER to do the burn, which he executed on January 2, 2007, just after the last employees had left the building

DYSON pleaded guilty on April 24, 2008. THROWER, the corporate manager of Platinum 21, pleaded guilty to the arson conspiracy on January 29, 2009. All three defendants will be sentenced on May 11, 2009 at 3 p.m. All face a minimum mandatory term of five years in custody and a maximum term of twenty years in custody.

This case is being investigated by Special Agents of the ATF and the FBI. Assistance has also been provided in this case by the U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Division and the Atlanta Fire Department.

Assistant United States Attorneys Zahra S. Karinshak and Robert C.I. McBurney are prosecuting the case.

For further information please contact David E. Nahmias, United States Attorney, or Charysse L. Alexander, Executive Assistant United States Attorney, through Patrick Crosby, Public Affairs Officer, U.S. Attorney's Office, at (404) 581-6016. The Internet address for the HomePage for the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Georgia is www.usdoj.gov/usao/gan.