

BAXTER ARSONISTS PLEAD GUILTY

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COOKEVILLE -- A man and a woman who set the fire that destroyed two buildings and heavily damaged another in Baxter last year stood before a judge and pleaded guilty yesterday. **Derek Adam Holloway, 26, of 7th Avenue South, Baxter, was sent to prison for nine years, beginning that sentence yesterday.**

Tabatha Charmane Whittenburg, 26, of Algood, took an eight-year sentence and will return to court in November to learn exactly how that sentence will be served. Both also pleaded guilty to other charges



-- he to burglary and she to sale of drugs -- and their sentences on those pleas are to run at the same time as their sentences for the arson. The fire happened around 3 a.m. March 14, 2008, in downtown Baxter, the flames sweeping rapidly through adjoining buildings destroying the Wagon Wheel restaurant and the S&S Furniture Store and heavily damaging the Baxter Bi-Rite grocery store. Investigators said one person was inside the Wagon Wheel restaurant at the time of the fire, and though no one was injured, the potential danger to that person figured into the aggravated arson charges brought against Holloway and Whittenburg, who were arrested in the case a

few months later.

In court yesterday, Assistant District Attorney Tony Craighead told Judge David Patterson that Holloway and Whittenburg had been "kicked out" of the Wagon Wheel restaurant the night before the fire and that they were later seen loading hay into Holloway's vehicle. "And someone matching his description was seen behind the building where the fire started that night," Craighead said.

Later, as the investigation proceeded, detectives found the trunk liner from Holloway's vehicle where he had discarded it and found strands of hay in it, the prosecutor said. Holloway and Whittenburg were each charged with one count of aggravated arson and two counts of arson. In the plea arrangement accepted yesterday, they each pleaded guilty to the lesser offense of "facilitation of aggravated arson" in exchange for his nine-year sentence and her eight-year sentence.

Holloway was taken into custody immediately, and Whittenburg was told to return to court in late November when the "manner of service" of her sentence will be determined by the court at a sentencing hearing. Holloway was represented by attorney Mike Giaimo, and Whittenburg was represented by attorney Doug Dennis.

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