



BOAT ARSON SUSPECT REACHES PLEA BARGAIN MENTALLY AILING MAN TO GET 2-YEAR TERM IN MARINA BLAZES

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A man suspected of torching 27 boats in Macomb County could be free in 18 months, under a plea agreement reached Friday.

Richard Sarvis, 38, pleaded no contest to three arson charges as well as two charges of resisting arrest, one charge of drunken driving and one charge of possession of marijuana during a pretrial conference in Macomb County Circuit Court.

In return for Sarvis' pleas, Judge Thomas Brookover will sentence the Clinton Township man to no more than 2 years in prison, **Scott Weinberg**, Sarvis' attorney, said.

Sarvis, a disabled former trucker who suffers from severe anxiety and depression, will receive credit for the time he has spent in jail since his Oct. 21 arrest. He could be free by October 2001. Sentencing was set for April 17.

At least one marina owner said Friday he thought the sentence would be adequate.

"They can only prove that he set a couple of them," said Mike Carter, sales manager of Sundog Marina in Harrison Township, which was struck three times by arson. "It sounds like whoever is prosecuting this man doesn't have enough evidence to make it stick."

Carter added that he thought more than one person was responsible for the arsons. He would not elaborate beyond saying he didn't think Sarvis was capable of torching all 27 boats.

Police arrested Sarvis after witnesses reported seeing him set two boats ablaze on Oct. 21 -- the anniversary of the first boat arson. Prosecutors said they suspect Sarvis of perpetrating the year-long arson spree in Harrison Township. The 27 boats were valued at between \$50,000 and \$200,000

each.

No boats have been torched since Sarvis' arrest, and Macomb County Assistant Prosecutor Irit Walters predicted after the plea agreement was reached, "I don't expect that we'll be seeing any other boat arsons."

But Weinberg, who said Sarvis does not admit to setting any fires, said prosecutors have no evidence to support their claims. He said Sarvis and his family decided he should enter the no-contest pleas to avoid a lengthy trial that could interfere with his plan to seek treatment.

"He's a nice, sweet gentleman who needs help for his mental health problems," Weinberg said, adding that Sarvis will receive treatment during his prison term.

If convicted of arson, Sarvis faced up to 10 years in prison.

But Walters said it was unlikely Brookover would sentence Sarvis to more than a year in prison, based on sentencing guidelines for people with nearly spotless records.

"We're very happy with this," Walters said of the plea agreement. "He's going to serve a minimum of 2 years, and that's more than we would have got had we tried him."

She said Sarvis gave no indication during a psychiatric examination as to why he would set such fires.

"I would hope that he does get help in prison," Walters said.

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