

Media Release

Yavapai County Sheriff's Office
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Home Destroyed by Fire – Arson Suspect In-Custody



Above – Juniper Woods home fully engulfed in fire
Right – The resulting damage to the home



On September 10, 2016, detectives from the YCSO Criminal Investigations Bureau were called to investigate a suspicious fire in a remote section of Juniper Woods near Ash Fork, Arizona. Deputies, who were already on scene after the 6:30 PM 9-1-1 call, had identified witnesses. Those witnesses provided statements to detectives regarding the suspicious actions involving 44-year-old Irene Hillard.

Detectives learned that Hillard had just gone into the home ostensibly to remove personal property because she was moving to another location. At one point, she was seen walking out of the home as flames became visible from a bedroom where a pile of paper and picture frames were now burning. Neighbors in the area noticed the flames and called the local fire department. While waiting for the fire department, the fire subsided and seemed to go out on its own. Neighbors noted that Hillard remained on the property pending the arrival of fire personnel. After approximately 10 minutes passed,



Hillard

neighbors noticed the house was now fully engulfed in flames. When neighbors returned to the property, they saw Hillard standing in front of the house, 'smiling,' and drinking a beer. Fire officials arrived and eventually extinguished the fire. The house was a total loss – estimated value \$120,000.

Background - Hillard had been staying at the house with the owner who was currently away on business. Detectives confirmed that Hillard's trailer, also in Juniper Woods, was recently destroyed by fire and she needed a place to stay. This homeowner agreed to let her stay at his place and act as a caretaker while he was gone.

A major issue of concern for fire suppression efforts involved two large water tanks on the property which had been recently drained restricting the amount of water available to the fire department. Detectives believe this was an intentional act. Additionally, a propane tank was found inside the living room of the home. Hillard later admitted bringing the tank inside, but denied starting the fire claiming it resulted from a gas leak. Detectives discovered stashes of Hillard's personal items in a detached shed and hidden in bushes on the property. It is believed Hillard removed those items from the home to keep them from being destroyed by the intentionally set fire.

Detectives contacted the homeowner by phone at his out of state location and briefed him on the incident. He noted a lot of problems with Hillard in recent weeks. Further details have not yet been documented except to indicate apparent animosity from Hillard towards the homeowner.

Detectives developed addition information during the investigation providing further evidence of Hillard's intentional act of arson to the home. As a result she was arrested and booked on charges including Arson of an Occupied Structure and Property Damage. She remains in-custody on a \$250,000 bond.

Citizens can contact the Yavapai County Sheriff's Office with information or questions at 928-771-3260 or the YCSO website:
www.vcsoaz.gov