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Jury convicts man of arson

Strobel sentenced to 10 years in prison

By Julie Arrington
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A Winder man will serve 10 years in prison for helping his former girlfriend torch her northeastern Forsyth home as part of an alleged insurance scam.

Late Thursday, a jury convict-

ed Steven Edward Strobel, 47, of one count of first-degree arson in connection with the Jan. 18, 2009, fire that destroyed the Lanier Drive home of Pamela Morrow Graf.

Superior Court Judge Jeffrey S. Bagley denied the defense's request for first offender status

and handed down a 20-year sentence, half of which will be served on probation.

He must also pay a \$2,000 fine. Restitution will be determined at a later date.

Before hearing his punishment, Strobel said he hasn't seen Graf "since this happened."

"Money had nothing to do with anything," he said. "Up until [Wednesday], I could not say she burned down her house. I did lie, but I had nothing to do with this."

Graf has pleaded not guilty to the arson charge, as well as one count each of possession of cocaine and possession of marijuana less than an ounce. Her



Strobel

case has not gone to trial.

After the blaze, Graf told authorities she and Strobel left Jan. 16, 2009, for the presidential inauguration in Washington, D.C., and were not at the house when it burned down.

Graf, 48, also maintained that she was targeted

See ARSON | 4A

FROM 1A

Arson

because of her support of President Barack Obama and that the spray-painting of a racial slur and phrase on a fence along her property was a hate crime.

Testimony in Strobel's case began Tuesday, after a jury of six women and eight men was impaneled.

After the prosecution rested its case Thursday morning, Bagley denied a motion from Strobel's attorney, Brian Daly of Savannah, to dismiss the case.

Strobel was the lone witness in his defense, testifying Thursday that he had lied to investigators, but also told the truth.

Forsyth County Chief Assistant District Attorney Sandy Partridge and Assistant District Attorney James Dunn handled the prosecution.

During lengthy and often contentious testimony, Strobel said the initial plan was to go to Washington, D.C., but he and Graf never made

it there.

Partridge challenged statements Strobel made on the stand and during the video-recorded interviews with authorities in winter 2009, parts of which had been shown earlier in the trial.

At one point she drew a chart, labeled it "lies" and attempted to go through Strobel's version of events point by point.

Prior to Strobel's testimony Thursday, the jury heard from Rodney Wilson, a claim representative for State Farm Insurance, and Timothy Eckel, a financial consultant, about Graf's home insurance policy and her economic situation.

Wednesday, witnesses called by the prosecution testified that many of Graf's personal belongings — including family photos and home movies, furniture, tax documents and clothing — were found after the blaze in two storage units Strobel had paid for in Barrow County.

The witnesses, which included fire investigators and two of Graf's three children, also said some items found at Strobel's house belonged to Graf.