

Jury returns a guilty verdict in arson case

A Cole County Circuit Court jury has convicted a Jefferson City man of second-degree arson for encouraging another man to set a fire that gutted the defendant's appliance repair shop last spring.

Michael G. Gilley, 37, was found guilty of the felony charge in connection with the blaze at A Reliable Appliance Service, 5711 W. Business 50.

The second day of Gilley's trial ended this morning with the jury recommending the maximum possible sentence of seven years in prison and a fine for the defendant. Circuit Judge Tom Brown is expected to hand down the sentence at a later date.

Gilley took the witness stand on Wednesday to deny admissions that he made in a tape recorded interview which was conducted in June by Randy Cole, an investigator for the state fire marshal's office.

The jury heard the recording in which Gilley said he knew that David Grant, who was living at the business operated by Gilley, would set the fire so Gilley could file an \$80,000 insurance claim.

Grant has admitted he started the flames with a kerosene lamp on May 25. He pleaded guilty to an arson charge and awaits sentencing in circuit court.

On the witness stand, Gilley said that he confessed while he was in jail so he could get his bond reduced from \$50,000 to

\$10,000.

"(Cole) told me this is what he wanted to hear," Gilley testified. "He asked me the questions a couple of days before (the taped interview) without the tape."

"Mr. Gilley figured out that if he told them what they wanted to hear, he could get out of jail," defense attorney Jeff Spainhower told the jury in his closing argument.

But Assistant Prosecuting Attorney Bill Tackett urged the jury to think of Gilley as a con man. He characterized Gilley's defense as "the bondsman on the grassy knoll conspiracy."

Tackett asked the jury to consider Gilley's prior convictions — which include receiving stolen property, impersonating a law enforcement officer and driving while intoxicated — as testament of his lack of credibility.

"The concept of Randy Cole doing what the defendant said he did is so ludicrous," said Tackett.

The prosecution also argued that Gilley was addicted to drugs and was deeply in debt at the time of the fire.

The jury deliberated for about 40 minutes before returning the guilty verdict.

"The jury set the standard for those who try to use arson as a way to pay for drugs or to crawl out from under financial problems," Tackett said.