



NEWS RELEASE

OFFICE OF LOUISIANA STATE FIRE MARSHAL

Department of Public Safety & Corrections • Public Safety Services

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Louisiana Investigative Agency Recognized by International Organization

Baton Rouge, LA – An intensive, focused, and intentional partnership between investigators of the Louisiana State Fire Marshal's Office and other public and private agencies in the investigation of a large restaurant fire resulted in the recognition of the State Fire Marshal's Office by a prestigious international association.

The Louisiana chapter of the International Association of Arson Investigators presented a collective "Investigator of the Year" award to the Investigations Division after an investigation into the arson fire that destroyed the Rendezvous Dinner Club in Ville Platte in July 2013.

The award is the first by the group to an agency division. Those investigators specifically recognized for their contributions to the investigation were Chief Deputy Brant Thompson, Assistant Chief Lance Carruth, Capt. Nicholas Heinen, Capt. Keith Reed, Capt. Ricky Roubique, Lt. Mark Dupuis, and Lt. Mitch Trahan.

During the course of the fire investigation, State Fire Marshal investigators discovered that a restaurant employee, Eric G. Johnson, started a fire in the structure after the owner, John G. Deville, Jr., promised to pay him from an anticipated insurance policy payout.

Investigators compiled compelling evidence against the two that included video surveillance footage, vendor receipts, witness statements, and the recovery of the restaurant's security video system, which Johnson had removed and later discarded in an isolated Evangeline Parish bayou.

Unfortunately for Johnson and Deville, the system was recovered by a fire department dive team, one of eight (8) state and local agencies and one (1) private investigative company that assisted in the investigation. Subsequently, Johnson was convicted of aggravated arson and injury by arson in March 2015. In December 2015, Deville pled guilty to simple arson.

Assisting agencies included the Alexandria Fire Department, Evangeline Parish District Attorney's Office, Jefferson Davis Parish Sheriff's Office, Lafayette Fire Department, Louisiana State Police Crime Lab, Rapides Parish Fire Protection District 2, St. Landry Parish Sheriff's Office, Ville Platte Fire Department, and Forensic Investigations Group, a private investigative firm based in Covington.

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NEWS RELEASE – ADDENDUM

LAAI Award Presentation – November 30, 2016



Chief Deputy Brant Thompson receiving the “Investigator of the Year” award from Louisiana Association of Arson Investigators board member Rick Jones, Wednesday, November 30, 2016. Others present were (from left to right) State Fire Marshal H. ‘Butch’ Browning, Jr., Lt. Mitch Trahan, Capt. Ricky Roubique, Capt. Keith Reed, Assistant Chief Lance Carruth, and Capt. Nick Heinen.