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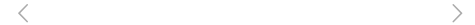





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ST. CLOUD AREA RELIGIOUS LEADERS PREACHING PEACE, UNDERSTANDING

JIM MAURICE | Published: May 23, 2019

St. Cloud Area Faith Leaders, photo by WJON.com's Jim Maurice



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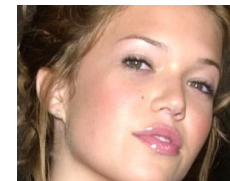
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ST. CLOUD -- As violence against various religions increases around the world, there is a group of faith leaders here in St. Cloud trying to preach a message of tolerance. The Greater St. Cloud Area Faith Leaders was formed five years ago in response to acts of vandalism at a local mosque.

Michael Peterson is with St. John's Abbey in Collegeville. He says the pastors, elders, and other leaders meet once a month. He says they also host "Circles of Understanding" events for members of their congregations.

“ *Where we have small circles, 7-8 people, discussing together in civil conversations. Each person gets to talk, we just talk about the difficult topics.*

”

Peterson says they also have their annual community picnic coming up in August at Lake George. The faith leaders release statements and letters in times of crisis or concern.

He says they understand it takes time, but they want to lead by example.

“ *It's hard to change people's hearts, I know my heart can be pretty hardened at times. This Friday our group is invited by the local Islamic Center to celebrate the Iftar and I look forward to that a lot because we'll have a lot of good food and good company. I hope that is advertised that these faith leaders are going into a mosque.*

”

The Greater St. Cloud Area Faith Leaders includes members of the Catholic, Muslim, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Unitarian, Methodist, and Jewish communities.

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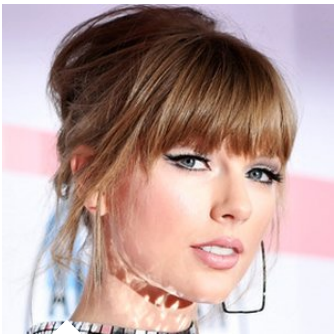
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When You Quit Drinking Soda,
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GRAND JURY INDICTS PRESS BAR OWNER ON FEDERAL CHARGES

LEE VOSS | Published: December 11, 2020

Andrew Welsh (PHOTO: Stearns County Jail)



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ST. CLOUD -- The owner of the Press Bar and Parlor faces federal charges after a federal grand jury indicted him on three counts related to the fire that destroyed the downtown St. Cloud bar in February.

A news release from the Stearns County Attorney's Office states the grand jury has indicted 41-year-old **Andrew Welsh** on charges of arson, use of a fire to commit a federal felony, and wire fraud.

According to the indictment, Welsh burned down the bar on the night of February 17th to collect approximately \$1.4-million in insurance money on what had become a failing business.

The charges take the case out of state court and into federal jurisdiction where the penalties can be much higher.

Following the fire, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco Firearms and Explosives was called in to investigate. They determined Welsh was the last one to leave the bar before closing up and the fire originated on the top of his desk in the basement office.

A specially trained dog indicated the presence of an accelerant on the desk. ATF Forensic Science Laboratory testing confirmed the findings.

Court records show the ATF experts systematically ruled out all other accidental causes including appliance failure and determined the fire was intentionally lit.

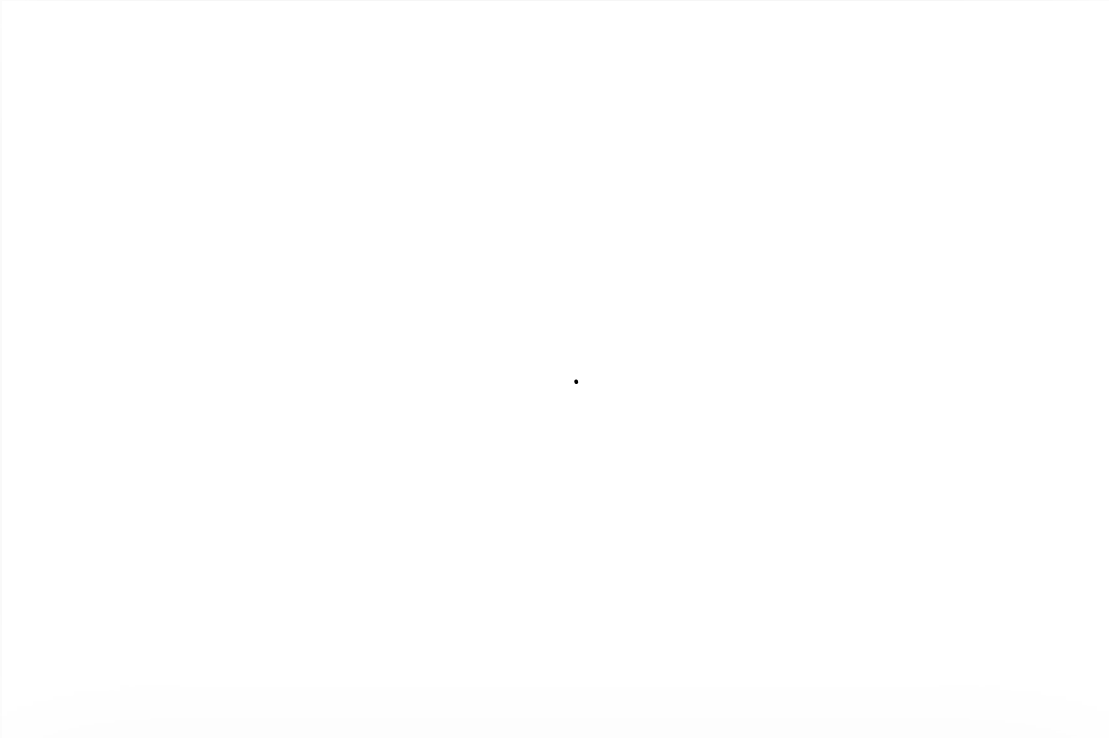
Search warrants were then served at a home in Sauk Rapids where Welsh had apparently been staying after his divorce. Authorities say they found nearly \$2,000 in cash inside his SUV and a bottle of Ronsonol lighter fuel on the floor of his truck.

The ATF arrested Welsh on the charges Friday.

The U.S. Attorney's Office will now be prosecuting the case.

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Photo: Conner Dols



Press Bar fire. Feb. 17, 2020 (Abby Faulkner)



(Photo: Alex Svejkovsky, WJON)



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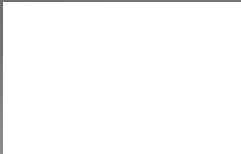
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