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MERCED PROSECUTOR CHOSEN ARSON PROSECUTOR OF THE YEAR

Merced County Deputy District Attorney Walter Wall has been selected as the Central Valley Arson Investigators' Association Prosecutor of the Year for his work in obtaining a conviction in the 2003 arson of Big Al's Steakhouse and Cantina, in Merced.

Following two trials that ended in hung juries of 11 to 1 for guilty, Adolfo Pulido, the owner of Big Al's, entered felony pleas to one count of arson, a felony and a strike under California's "Three Strikes and You're Out" law. Pulido was sentenced to a year in custody, directed to pay more than \$60,000 in restitution and ordered deported. Pulido also will be required to register as an arsonist under state law.

Wall, 44, has been a prosecutor in the District Attorney's office since 2006. Prior to joining the DA's office, Wall had served as a Merced County Deputy County Counsel. He is the second member of the Merced County District Attorney's office to receive the Association's award. District Attorney Larry D. Morse II previously won the award.

Andrew Derrick, a retired Merced Fire Department Captain and Fire Arson Investigator, nominated Wall for the award. Derrick, who is currently the principal investigator with Derrick Fire Investigations, provided expert analysis and testimony in the case.

"Arson investigators know better than anyone how challenging these cases are to prosecute," Derrick said. "On behalf of our Association's members, we are grateful for the tremendous effort Walter gave this case. Despite narrowly escaping justice with a hung jury, Mr. Pulido couldn't escape Walter's commitment to seeing that justice was done in this case,

Morse described arson cases as "among the most difficult for any prosecutor for the simple reason that much of the evidence has been destroyed. Walter worked tirelessly with arson investigators to obtain a conviction in this complex case. He is dedicated to the pursuit of justice as this case demonstrated, and it is an honor to have a person with Walter's talents and integrity as a member of the District Attorney's office."

Wall was honored on Saturday, Jan. 15th in Visalia during the Arson Investigators Association's annual installation dinner and awards ceremony. The Association is dedicated to training law enforcement and fire department personnel in the investigation of fire, arson/fraud, explosions and bombing incidents in Merced, Mariposa, Fresno, Tulare, Kings and Kern Counties.