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**ARRESTS MADE IN THE UC ORIENTAL MARKET FIRE IN
DOWNTOWN MERCED**

At 7:00 a.m. this morning, detectives from the Merced Police Department arrested the owners of the UC Oriental Market, 44-year-old Mai Moua and her husband 49-year-old Zang Her, in connection to the December 18, 2016 fire that left the building located at 630 W. Main in Merced completely destroyed, announced District Attorney Larry D. Morse II.

The blaze began around 10:00 a.m. that Sunday morning, and firefighters were on scene in just over four minutes after receiving the call. The fire was battled by a total of 51 firefighters from the City Fire Department, Turlock Fire Department, and Merced County Fire Department.

Although there were ultimately no injuries, firefighters have described this structural fire as one of the most significant in recent Merced history because of the risk to the firefighters involved in containing it.

Due to the nature of the fire, an arson investigation was initiated by the Merced Police Department and the Merced City Fire Department Investigation Unit, and was aided by a forensic accountant from the Federal Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms.

The losses from the fire are estimated to be over \$1 million in total.

Moua and Her recently purchased the UC Oriental Market, however, they did not own the building.

Both defendants were booked at the Merced County jail and have been charged with one count each of arson of a structure, and one count each of filing a fraudulent insurance claim. Arson is considered a strike offense under California law, requiring registration as an arsonist, and the charges carry a maximum of seven years in state prison.

“Arson is a strike offense under California law for good reason. Structural fires like this one pose great risk for the firefighters trying to contain them. We were extremely fortunate that none of the 51 firefighters battling this blaze were injured. It could have been so much worse,” Morse said.