

# Bourne Found Innocent of Arson

■ By KATHY ROPP  
Editor

Conway florist Tom Bourne was back arranging and delivering flowers this week after a jury found him innocent of setting fire to his downtown Conway flower shop in May of 2001.

Bert von Herrmann with the 15th Judicial Circuit Solicitor's Office argued that James Thomas "Tom" Bourne, 59, torched his own business, the Ruby Begonia Flower Shop, because he needed money and he had \$175,000 in insurance to cover lost merchandise and income.

"He was the only one who could have done it...The evidence is just as clear as anything in the world," von Herrmann told the jury in his closing statement.

The assistant solicitor said the only scenario that makes sense is Bourne pulled his van around from behind the store, parked in front of the building on 3rd Avenue, opened the door, poured something inside the front of the building, set it on fire and drove away.

Bourne, who has adamantly proclaimed his innocence since his arrest in August of 2001, did not testify in the three-day trial.

Billy Joe Sawyer, the chief electrical

inspector for the city of Conway, testified he believes the fire was the result of an electrical problem.

Sawyer said he went to the site the day after the May 8, 2001, fire at the request of an investigator, but wasn't there to do a thorough investigation.

"I wasn't very investigational," Sawyer said. "I checked the receptacle area and it looked like it started in a receptacle and went up. My opinion from what I saw, I thought that's what caused the fire. I thought it was an electrical fire."

But Battalion Chief Darrell McDowell

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Tom Bourne