

Woman gets suspended sentence in fire that killed cat

By John Nickerson
Staff Writer

STAMFORD — A Norwalk woman was given a 10-year suspended sentence yesterday for setting her downstairs apartment on fire during an apparent suicide attempt that killed her cat in February.

Karen Geiffert, 51, formerly of 23 Mills St., Norwalk, pleaded guilty yesterday to first-degree arson and cruelty to animals in state Superior Court in Stamford.

In addition to the 10-year suspended sentence, Judge John Kavanewsky gave Geiffert five years of probation and required her to continue outpatient treatment.

Geiffert, who has been held on \$350,000 bond at York Correctional Institution in Niantic since her release in April from Norwalk Hospital's psychiatric unit, set her bedroom on fire Feb. 23 with flammable fireplace logs.

After firefighters put out the early afternoon fire, they discovered the flammable logs on Geiffert's bed, surrounded by newspapers and a box of synthetic starter kindling. Geiffert's lower-level apartment in the two-family Mills Street home had no chimney.

Firefighters found a gray and black cat, which had died of smoke inhalation, and a short-haired calico cat that appeared healthy.

Police said the fire endangered an elderly woman who lived above Geiffert.

Attorney John Thygerson said he was pleased with Kavanewsky's decision. It is unusual for someone to plead guilty to arson, a class A felony, and not receive jail time, he said.

At an appearance in Norwalk court in April, Thygerson said Geiffert was suffering from mental illness, which came on suddenly and without warning.