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PRESS RELEASE

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Hopland man sentenced to state prison for targeting wife in house fire

A Hopland man who set fire to his house in a bid to kill his wife was sentenced this past Friday in the Mendocino County Superior Court to seven years to life in state prison.

Steven Phillip Chiriboga, formerly of Hopland, will be eligible for parole consideration only after he has served no less than seven years, said Deputy District Attorney Shannon Cox. Chiriboga averted a jury trial on July 7, 2011 by changing his plea to guilty of attempted murder in the first degree four days before the date set for the commencement of jury selection. Prosecutor Cox said Chiriboga's wife agreed to the plea bargain, and was relieved that she did not have to go through a trial. The sentencing judge was the Honorable Richard Henderson.

Cox on Monday said the victim appeared at Chiriboga's sentencing last Friday, and showed "incredible grace and dignity" in addressing the court. "She spoke as a wife, mother and victim," said Cox.

Chiriboga was taken into custody in Sonoma County on Sept. 6, 2010, two days after he fled Hopland following his wife's rescue by neighbors from a Mountain House Road residence.

Investigators said Chiriboga had opened valves to a gas line in the home's kitchen, and set the house on fire after his wife returned home. Chiriboga refused to let his wife leave the burning house, which he had subsequently barricaded shut.

Neighbors were able to force their way into the house, and drag Chiriboga and his wife out of the burning structure. Chiriboga then fled in his pickup truck, where he was spotted two days later in the Sea Ranch area. As the crime was unfolding at the Chiriboga residence, the Hopland Fire Department was holding its annual fundraising BBQ just down the road. As a result, the firemen were able to quickly respond to the fire and extinguish it.