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Medina guilty in apartment-fire deaths

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BRIGHTON - A jury didn't believe that a 21-year-old man intended no harm when he torched two apartment buildings last summer, causing the deaths of two occupants. But the panel didn't consider David Medina a killer, either.

Jurors yesterday rejected first-degree murder charges against Medina, instead finding him guilty of two counts of criminally negligent homicide and third-degree assault. For Medina, conviction on the lesser charges means he could be out of prison in a relatively short time. Criminally negligent homicide is a felony that carries a prison sentence of up to eight years on each conviction. Third-degree assault is a misdemeanor, carrying a six-month jail sentence. Had Medina been found guilty of first-degree murder, he would have gone to prison for the rest of his life. Medina and his cousin, Michael Brungardt, were accused of starting fires during the early-morning hours of June 11, 1994. One was set at the Pinetree Village Apartments at 7530 N. Broadway; the other at Mountain Knolls apartments, 101 E. 88th Ave. Both of the buildings were destroyed. Pinetree Village residents Paul Hernandez, 31, and Donald Dunnell, 42, died in the fire there. Medina had girlfriends in both of the apartment buildings. He lived with the one at Mountain Knolls. Brungardt and Medina both were initially charged with two counts of first-degree murder, first-degree assault and more than 40 counts of arson, one for each family burned out of its apartment. Brungardt was allowed to plead guilty to second-degree murder and second-degree assault in exchange for testifying against his cousin. He said he and Medina visited the girlfriend at Pinetree Village before going to Mountain Knolls about 2:30 a.m. Medina wasn't angry,

Brungardt said, nor did he have reason to want to harm either of his girlfriends. Brungardt testified that he and Medina were horsing around, holding their cigarette lighters to the walls and stairway carpeting in both buildings. He said they did not intend to start fires.

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