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News Release

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Felon sentenced as armed career criminal in Project Exile Minneapolis gun case

MINNEAPOLIS – Earlier today in federal court, a 38-year-old Minneapolis felon was sentenced for possessing a firearm. United States District Court Judge David S. Doty ordered Mandel McDonald Benson to serve 235 months in federal prison after earlier being found guilty by a jury on one count of felon in possession of a firearm. Because of his extensive, violent criminal history, Benson was sentenced as an armed career criminal. As such, the minimum sentence the court could impose was 15 years. Since the federal legal system does not have parole, Benson will serve virtually the entire sentence imposed by Judge Doty. Benson was indicted on October 5, 2010, and was convicted on February 10, 2011.

Trial evidence proved that on December 15, 2009, Bloomington police found Benson in possession of a .357-caliber revolver. He was apprehended following a brief chase that was preceded by a shoplifting incident at a local Wal-Mart. Police recovered the handgun from inside a black bag that Benson was carrying at the time of his arrest. The revolver had three live rounds of ammunition in the cylinder.

Because Benson is a convicted felon, he is prohibited from possessing firearms or ammunition at any time. His past felony convictions include third-degree aggravated robbery in 1992, simple robbery in 1997, and attempted first-degree aggravated robbery in 2000, all occurring in Hennepin County. At the time of sentencing, Benson also had two pending felony charges in Hennepin County.

This case was the result of an investigation by the Bloomington Police Department, the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, the Hennepin County Sheriff's Office-Crime Lab, and the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. It was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Jeffrey M. Bryan and Laura M. Provinzino.

This case was charged federally as a part of Project Exile Minneapolis. That law enforcement initiative was launched on July 22, 2010, as part of a citywide effort to reduce gun violence. Through Project Exile, the Minneapolis Police Department and the ATF work together to apprehend serial criminals for violations of gun laws. Then, the Hennepin County Attorney's Office teams up with the U.S. Attorney's Office to determine where those offenders will most effectively be prosecuted – state or federal court. Those determinations are based on the offenders' criminal histories and current charges, among other factors. To date, the U.S. Attorney's Office has brought charges against close to two dozen serious habitual criminals through Project Exile Minneapolis.

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