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Arsonist now in adult system

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The teen who set fire to Needville High School nearly two years ago appeared in a felony district court Monday, where supervision of his probation was transferred from the juvenile to the adult system.

"I think this experience has made me a much better person, but it wasn't worth hurting so many people and destroying so much property," said Chris Maresh, 18, who committed the

offense when he was 16.

Maresh appeared in court with his mother, and he was jovial with his juvenile probation officer and other court staff. He received a 10-year probation sentence on March 7, 2008 on a charge of first-degree felony arson. He set fire to the school on April 23, 2007, resulting in extensive damage to its front wing, which stood out from other high schools for its old-fashioned, wooden floor and its historic feel.

Prosecutors in 2007 first asked for Maresh to face trial as an adult, and af-

ter a judge declined that request, they sought a prison sentence against him. Instead, the judge issued a 10-year probation sentence, with terms including the completion of 2,000 hours of community service work and restitution of \$24,000.

Maresh has since performed 491 hours of community service work and has paid off \$1,400 in restitution. Judge Jim Shoemake of the 434th District Court praised Maresh for his compliance with probation terms, but urged him to continue following the

rules set for him, even if they seem onerous.

Otherwise, Shoemake could send Maresh to prison.

"I want you to succeed; I don't want you to end up in prison or to waste your life," he said.

Maresh has been working on weekends for a local landscaping company, and has been mowing lawns on his own, as well, he said. He said he will examine the possibility of enrolling in the National Guard and that he wishes to attend college.