

# Los Angeles Times

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*From the Los Angeles Times*

## Man gets 5 years in tree massacre

**The 61-year-old, who felled 500 trees that blocked his view of Sin City, had made other threats, a prosecutor says.**

By Ashley Powers

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LAS VEGAS — Residents of an upscale retirement community near here knew Douglas Hoffman was upset that trees were blocking his backyard view of the Strip.

But at a hearing Monday, where Hoffman was sentenced to up to five years in prison for killing more than 500 trees, a prosecutor said the retired construction worker had threatened to unleash "chemical, biological, nuclear mass destruction" because of it.

Dressed in jail garb and handcuffed to his wheelchair, Hoffman, 61, slumped and lowered his eyes when Judge Donald M. Mosley announced his sentence.

"I am not a bad person. I am a good person," said Hoffman, who has hip, back, heart and prostate problems.

The case has been closely watched in fast-growing Clark County, where tract homes and transplanted trees have obscured many homeowners' mountain and casino views.

A few years ago, Hoffman and his wife bought a second home in a Henderson retirement haven just south of Las Vegas. Mesquite trees and other recently planted vegetation soon grew 8 feet tall, obscuring the view from their deck. The couple asked a homeowners committee if they could swap out the trees for shrubs, but were told no.

Shortly after, in October 2004, a yearlong tree massacre began. Tops were lopped off. Entire trees were chopped down. The damage neared \$250,000. And the community panicked.

"If he was cutting trees, was he going to cut people next?" said Richard Cancellier, 73, who came to Hoffman's sentencing Monday with several neighbors.

When he was caught, Hoffman -- whom a fellow resident had spotted near a freshly cut tree -- was carrying a single-blade saw. In November, a jury convicted the retiree of 10 counts of malicious destruction of trees.

Resorting to vandalism to restore his view of the Strip, Hoffman attorney Christopher R. Oram said Monday, was "very serious." But in arguing for a lighter sentence, Oram reminded the judge that his client "cut down trees. . . . He did not physically hurt another human being."

In pushing for a harsh sentence, Clark County Deputy Dist. Atty. Joshua Tomsheck on Monday revealed that a rambling, typed letter had been sent to the governor's office while Hoffman was awaiting trial.

"If no changes come soon -- and soon means now, immediately -- the militia has many options," it read. Among those listed were razing and burning homes, drive-by shootings, setting off improvised explosive devices and unleashing a weapons cache.

The letter was signed "USA Organization Militia LLC," Tomsheck said, but Hoffman's thumbprint was on the address label.

Mosley said the letter didn't factor into his decision to put Hoffman behind bars -- more important was how the methodical tree-slashing frightened Hoffman's neighbors.

"This man spent approximately 14 months," the judge said, wreaking havoc on this community.

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