



## Hernando County Sheriff's Office

A STATE ACCREDITED LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCY

P.O. BOX 10070 – BROOKSVILLE, FL 34603-0070 FAX 352 796-0493 PHONE 352 754-6830

### Media Release

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**From:** Corporal Wendy McGinnis  
Public Information Officer, 352-754-6830

**Re:** Unlicensed Contractor Sting

**Date:** November 15, 2011

**Case Number:** 2011-38552, 2011-38532, and 2011-38514

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**Suspects:**

- 1. Paul Kariotis w/m 09-17-1953 (2011-38552)**  
4144 Thunderbird Ave.  
Spring Hill, Florida 34606
- 2. Phillip Vance Ortiz w/m 05-03-1961 (2011-38532) (Registered Felon)**  
12086 Pitcairn St.  
Brooksville, Florida, 34613
- 3. Darrell Taylor w/m 02-08-1956 (2011-38514)**  
378 Culbreath Rd.  
Brooksville, Florida 34602

**Charges for All Suspects:**

**Unlicensed Contracting 489.127 (Bond \$500)**

On November 10, 2011, the Hernando County Sheriff's Office conducted an undercover operation in an attempt to put unlicensed contractors in Hernando County out of business. The Economic Crimes Unit has recognized a growing problem with unlicensed contractors operating in Hernando County. These individuals cause loss of work for legitimate contractors by undercutting prices and obtaining work that would normally go to properly licensed contractors. Citizens may feel they are getting a better deal for a lower price, but they are sacrificing quality guaranteed workmanship. In many cases the unlicensed contractor will not obtain the proper permits, which often results in work that is not inspected and may even be unsafe.

There can be several forms of victimization by unlicensed contractors. Occasionally deposits are collected, and the unlicensed individuals never start the work then disappear with the victim's money. Unfortunately, sometimes these unlicensed contractors are never identified. Many unlicensed contractors perform subpar work which may later need to be repaired and sometimes

even redone. Elderly citizens are more at risk of unlicensed contractors, because they are more vulnerable and often more trusting.

During this investigation, the Hernando County Sheriff's Office identified multiple subjects that were advertising as licensed contractors through Craig's List, newspapers, and other forms of advertisement circulated throughout Hernando County. The suspects in this operation were positively identified through the Hernando County Building Department, the Brooksville City Building Officials, and the Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation as not having a contractor's license.

Between November 8 and November 9, 2011, controlled phone calls were placed to each of the suspects, who claimed to be licensed contractors. During the calls, they were asked to do work that, according to Florida Statute 489, would require a contractor's license. On November 10, 2011, each of the identified suspects responded to a pre-determined location within Hernando County to give an estimate on work that requires a contractor's license. All three of the suspects that came to the operation location were identified and arrested. The Brooksville City Police Department and City of Brooksville Building Official, Bill Golberg, assisted in this operational plan.

This criminal activity is on-going and more proactive measures are being developed to combat the number of unlicensed contractors operating in the county. The Hernando County Sheriff's Office will continue to monitor unlicensed contractor activity and will continue to make arrests for individuals who conduct contract work without a license. In Hernando County there has been a significant increase in reported fraud against the elderly, specifically in the area of air conditioning repairs.

The Hernando County Economic Crimes Units strongly encourages consumers to get a second estimate on all contractor-related repairs and/or construction. It is also VITAL to ask for license copies and/or license numbers, insurance, and any other materials that the profession requires. These two simple steps could reduce contractor fraud by an estimated 75%. It is also recommended that consumers NEVER get a 2<sup>nd</sup> estimate from someone referred by the original contractor, and NEVER reveal to the 2<sup>nd</sup> contractor that you already obtained a first estimate. ALWAYS tell the first contractor that you WILL NOT agree to a contract until obtaining a 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> or even 4<sup>th</sup> estimate. BE CAUTIOUS OF HIGH PRESSURE SALES. If an estimator refuses to leave or makes you uncomfortable, call 911 and a deputy will assist. Lastly, ALWAYS review your estimates with a trusted family member or friend before entering into a contract. To confirm a contractor is licensed in the State of Florida consumers can go to [www.myfloridalicense.com](http://www.myfloridalicense.com).

If a local business only requires a local contractor's license, their license information would not be registered with the state therefore, a consumer would not find the local business at [www.myfloridalicense.com](http://www.myfloridalicense.com). This does not mean they are an unlicensed contractor, it simply means they can only operate within the county they are licensed in. These are generally locally owned businesses. Hernando County consumers can find out if a local business has a valid contractor's license by asking the business or employee to see their contractor's license, or by calling the Hernando County Development Department at 352-754-4050.

If consumers follow those steps, they can greatly reduce the chances of being a victim of contractor fraud. Consumers can also log onto the Hernando County Sheriff's Office website or click [www.hernandosheriff.org/applications/fraud/](http://www.hernandosheriff.org/applications/fraud/) to access links to research the newest trends on fraud and ID theft.

"The Hernando County Sheriff's Office is committed to responding to the needs of the citizens of Hernando County," said Colonel Mike Maurer. "It is our mission to safeguard both life and

property, and that includes protecting some of our most vulnerable citizens. I commend our Economic Crime Unit for recognizing unlicensed contractors as being a problem in Hernando County and taking an aggressive approach in enforcing the laws that will protect consumers as well as protecting legitimate licensed contractors.”