



Hernando County Sheriff's Office

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

Media Release

From: Denise M. Moloney
Community/Media Relations Manager, 352-797-3609

Re: Three Arrested in Animal Cruelty Case

Date: January 10, 2017

On 01-04-17 at approximately 1:30 p.m., Animal Enforcement Officer Mandy Rowe was leaving an unrelated call for service when she passed by the residence at 18025 Nicholas Avenue in Garden Grove. Rowe immediately observed dogs that were tethered to a tree in the yard of said residence, which is in violation of Hernando County Ordinance 6-34, Regulation of Tethering. Rowe, with the assistance of Deputy Steven George, stopped to check on the dogs.

Upon entering the yard, Rowe and George observed at least three dogs on the east side of the mobile home that were tethered; one of the dogs appeared to be in distress.

They went to the door (on the opposite side of the mobile home) to see if someone was home. Near the front door they located a small wire cage with three Chihuahuas inside. The water bowl was dry and contained only dirt and it appeared that someone had dumped food into the cage haphazardly from the top.

Rowe and George located another small wire cage near the front door with a dog in it that appeared to be a Pitbull. Again, there was no water in the cage. This dog was lying in its own urine and feces.

Deputy George knocked on the door to see if anyone was home. Tabitha Gordon answered the door. Gordon advised that the dogs on the property belong to Tiny Tharpe, her mother-in-law. Gordon stated that her husband, Joshua Tharpe, helped to care for the dogs, but he was not currently at home. Gordon gave George and Rowe permission to walk around the property to check on the dogs.

George and Rowe proceeded back to the east side of the property to the dog that appeared to be in distress. There they found a female hound or possible Pitbull mix named Bella. Bella was huddled on the ground and was lying on shards of glass. The dog appeared to be

malnourished and lethargic. Bella was in very poor condition. Her ribs and shoulder blades were showing. Her left eye was swollen and had a green and yellow discharge coming from it. She did not move and appeared to have trouble even lifting her head when George and Rowe approached. There was no food or water for the dog. A metal cooking pot that was used for water was nearby; it was dry and had leaves in the bottom.

There was a black Pitbull tethered to a tree behind Bella. This dog had no food, water, or proper shelter.

A brown and white Pitbull mix was tethered near the black Pitbull. The dog was very thin, with its ribs showing. Again, the dog had no food, water, or proper shelter.

After checking on all of the dogs, Deputy George and AEO Rowe went back to speak with Tabitha Gordon about the poor conditions and dire need for corrective action. Again, Gordon told them that her husband helps to care for the dogs, and he wasn't home. Gordon made no attempt to take corrective action and appeared to have no concern for the safety and health of the dogs. She stated that Josh would be home soon and went back in the house.

All of the dogs appeared to be infested with fleas and covered in flies. There was garbage and the odor of rotting food, urine, and feces all over the property.

Officer Rowe, through her training and experience, then determined that all the animals were being mistreated. She believed, that Bella especially, was close to death and needed immediate medical attention which the caretakers of the animals refused to provide. To preserve the life of these animals, and to prevent further suffering and inhumane treatment they would have to be seized without delay and transported to Hernando County Animal Services.

While walking Bella to the AEO's vehicle, she demonstrated difficulty walking and had to keep stopping to take a break. At one point, she stopped and urinated on herself.

In total, 11 dogs were seized from the property.

Upon checking with Dr. Julie Rosenberger, the Veterinarian at Hernando County Animal Services, Deputy Steven George learned that in her training and experience that Bella was criminally neglected. Bella weighed 33 pounds upon intake and should have weighed about 45 pounds. She stated the dog was malnourished and extremely anemic from blood loss, due to thousands of fleas that she was infested with. Bella's body temperature was so low she required a heating pad to keep her alive. Bella's body condition on a scale of 1-9 was a "2" at intake. A score of "1" was explained to be the worst, where death is immediate. Dr. Rosenberger advised that Bella was probably sick for one month, possibly two. Dr. Rosenberger also stated that Bella would have been dead within three days, had she not received emergency medical treatment when she did.

Warrants were issued for the arrest of Tabitha Gordon, Tiny Tharpe, and Joshua Tharpe.

On 01-09-17, Deputy Steven George responded back to 18025 Nicholas Avenue in Garden Grove to serve the arrest warrants on these individuals.

All three individuals were arrested and charged as follows:

- **Tabitha Christina Gordon W/F DOB/07-13-1989**
 - Animal Cruelty
 - Bond - \$1,000
- **Tiny Elizabeth Tharpe W/F DOB/01-06-1964**
 - Animal Cruelty
 - Bond - \$1,000
- **Joshua Scott Tharpe W/M DOB/11-06-1985**
 - Animal Cruelty
 - Bond - \$1,000.

All of the dogs remain at Hernando County Animal Services.

A few photos will be posted on the HCSO FB page. Additional photos available upon request.

The Office of Sheriff:

The Office of the Sheriff is established by the Florida Constitution. As a constitutional officer, the Sheriff has the exclusive authority to administer his or her agency and is responsible for preserving the peace throughout the entire county, carrying out the laws of the state, the orders of Florida courts, and the ordinances of the Board of County Commissioners. The Sheriff is the chief law enforcement and correctional officer of the county.

Sheriff Al Nienhuis was initially appointed as the Sheriff of Hernando County by the Governor in January of 2011. He was then elected by the people of Hernando County in 2012, and remains accountable to them.