



Hernando County Sheriff's Office

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Media Release

From: Denise M. Moloney
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Re: K-9 Dzel Captures Burglary Suspect

Date: July 11, 2017

On 07-10-17 just after 5 p.m., Hernando County deputies were dispatched to 9259 Chase Street in Spring Hill regarding a Residential Burglary in progress. The residence was occupied.

Upon arrival, deputies met with Trena Sapp, who advised that Michael Whittenbarger arrived at her home after being told several times not to come. Whittenbarger began banging on the door, demanding to be let in. When Sapp continued to deny Whittenbarger entry into the residence, he removed a window unit air conditioner and broke away portions of drywall and attempted to gain entry into the residence.

When Sapp and Jessica Leal (Sapp's daughter) advised Whittenbarger that they were contacting law enforcement, Whittenbarger stated that he would slit his wrists. He then pulled an unknown object out of his pocket and held it to his wrist.

When Leal told Whittenbarger that law enforcement had been contacted, he fled from the residence on foot.

Deputies immediately set up a perimeter and called in a K-9 team to track the suspect. Deputy Jason Jernigan and K-9 Dzel arrived on scene and began tracking. The K-9 team tracked Whittenbarger west, then north, then west again, eventually to Geranium Avenue into an area thick with trees where K-9 Dzel located and bit Whittenbarger.

Whittenbarger was evaluated on scene by Fire/Rescue then transported to Oak Hill Hospital for treatment of dog bites. He was later transported to the Hernando County Detention Center.

While still on scene, deputies took possession of Whittenbarger's personal property which included a wallet, a pack of cigarettes, and a razor blade.

A computer check on Whittenbarger revealed a Felony warrant for Violation of Probation (original charge – Aggravated Assault w/Deadly Weapon).

Michael Lamar Whittenbarger W/M DOB/06-30-1997 was charged as follows:

- Probation Violation (warrant – listed above)
- Resist Officer/Obstruct w/o Violence
- Burglary Occupied Dwelling/Unarmed
- No Bond.

Deputies later learned that Whittenbarger and Jessica Leal (Sapp's daughter) have a son in common. Whittenbarger arrived last month from Nassau County Florida and has been living with his grandmother.

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.