



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: Man Arrested for Pointing a Laser Light at HCSO Helicopter

Date: November 27, 2017

On 11-25-17 just before 9:30 p.m., the Hernando County Sheriff's Office helicopter was deployed to assist with the search for a missing nine year-old child.

While searching for the missing child using Forward Looking Infrared (FLIR), Deputy Pilot Kyle Nugent and Tactical Flight Officer B.J. Hart were interrupted by a laser light being aimed directly at the helicopter. TFO Hart advised the laser light struck the helicopter approximately five times, interfering with his ability to see and therefore provide updated locations on the missing juvenile.

Hart and Nugent located the missing juvenile, from the air, a short time before the laser light incidents began. As TFO Hart was directing ground units to the child, the laser light incidents began. The extremely bright light shining directly at the helicopter interfered with the investigation and was a danger to those on board the helicopter as well as those on the ground.

It should be noted that any powerful laser source viewed from Infrared (IR) and FLIR equipment can cause severe damage to the human eye.

Once ground units located the missing child, TFO Hart directed other ground units to the location of the individual pointing the laser light at the helicopter.

Deputies were directed to 8029 Darts Street in Weeki Wachee.

Upon arrival, Deputy Keith McCabe contacted the resident, Eric D. Harper. McCabe asked Harper if he had been outside moments earlier, shining a laser light at the HCSO helicopter. Harper admitted to shining the laser light at the helicopter and produced the "laser pen" that he used.

Harper told deputies, “I didn’t know it was a crime, I’m sorry.”

Eric D. Harper W/M DOB/07-29-1982 was then placed under arrest and charged with Pointing a Laser Light at Driver or Pilot. His bond was set at \$5,000.

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.