



## Hernando County Sheriff's Office

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### Media Release

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

**Re:**                **Wrong-Way Driver Causes Deputy-Involved Crash on Spring Hill Drive**

**Date:**             **February 28, 2019**

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On 02-28-19 just after 1 a.m., Deputy David Merced was conducting proactive patrol in the area of Spring Hill Drive and Kass Circle in Spring Hill.

At approximately 1:11 a.m., Merced observed a blue Ford travelling eastbound on Spring Hill Drive with no tag light. Merced attempted to conduct a Traffic Stop at Spring Hill Drive and Omaha Circle. Unbeknownst to Merced, operators in the Emergency Communications Center were in the process of receiving a call regarding a wrong-way driver on Spring Hill Drive, near his location.

As Merced prepared to activate his emergency lights in order to execute the Traffic Stop, he immediately observed the blue Ford “go into the air” as if it had just collided with something. Merced had no time to react and crashed into the rear of the blue Ford.

Additional deputies and Hernando County Fire Rescue were dispatched to the scene.

Upon arrival, deputies observed a three-vehicle crash, with one vehicle, a red, 2009 Pontiac G-6 facing northwest, in the eastbound lane, with extreme front end damage. Both other vehicles were facing east. The blue Ford had front end damage (from the red Pontiac) and rear end damage (from the patrol vehicle) and the patrol vehicle had front end damage only (from crashing into the blue Ford).

Deputies observed **Eric Wayne Lollis W/M DOB/02-17-1986** lying on the pavement next to his vehicle. Deputies immediately detected the odor of burnt marijuana coming from the inside of Lollis’ vehicle and the smell of an alcoholic beverage coming from Lollis’ person. It should be noted that Lollis got out of his vehicle and laid on the pavement, he was not ejected.

Deputies on scene conducted a search of Lollis’ vehicle and located 8.4 grams of marijuana.

Traffic Deputy Francis Ritchie was called in to handle the traffic crash investigation.

Deputy Ritchie responded to the hospital to conduct interviews of all parties involved in the crash.

The female driver of the blue Ford advised that she observed headlights coming right at her in the wrong direction, at a high rate of speed and was unable to recall anything else. The driver received treatment at the hospital for non-life-threatening injuries.

The female front seat passenger in the blue Ford told Ritchie that they were heading eastbound on Spring Hill Drive and she saw headlights in their lane – she then braced for impact.

The male, back-seat passenger of the blue Ford, stated that he did not see anything but remembered only feeling the impact of the collision.

Deputy Ritchie then spoke with Lollis who was also in an exam room at the hospital. Upon entering the exam room, Ritchie was still able to detect a strong odor of an alcoholic beverage. Lollis stated that he could not recall anything about the crash, but that he has learned his lesson. Lollis told Ritchie that the marijuana inside the vehicle belonged to him.

The case remains open and charges are pending.

Deputy Merced will not be available for comment, he is home resting.

#### **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.**