



## Hernando County Sheriff's Office

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### Media Release

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**From:** Denise M. Moloney  
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**Re:** Marine Deputies Rescue Infant from Overturned Canoe

**Date:** January 6, 2020

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On 01-03-20, Marine Deputy Steve Snell was training Patrol Deputy Zachary Burkhart the position of Marine Deputy on the Weeki Wachee River. Both deputies were operating the Hernando County Sheriff's Office personal watercraft (PWC) to patrol the river, conduct watercraft stops, and check vessels for safety equipment.

At approximately 2:30 p.m., both deputies stopped in the area of the 2-mile marker to take a lunch break when they observed a canoe overturn.

Deputy Snell observed a female in the water and heard her screaming, "My baby!" Deputies Snell and Burkhart jumped back on Snell's PWC and went to the overturned canoe. The deputies turned the canoe over and immediately observed an infant car seat, upside down in the water.

Deputy Burkhart immediately pulled the car seat from the water and onto the PWC to see that there was an infant strapped in the car seat. The infant, later determined to be four-months-old, was not wearing a life jacket and did not appear to be breathing.

Deputy immediately Snell proceeded to the shoreline so first aid could be administered to the infant.

Upon arrival at the shoreline, the infant opened its eyes and began to cry.

The infant was transported from the scene by Hernando County Fire Rescue to a local hospital. The infant was later transferred to a pediatric facility for higher level monitoring. The infant was listed as stable at the time of the transfer.

The area where the incident occurred has a very strong current and is approximately 7-feet deep.

Investigation revealed when the parents rented the canoe, the person in charge of the canoe rental actually placed a life jacket on the infant before the family departed. It is unknown when and/or why the parents removed the life jacket from the infant.

Once the infant (along with the mother) were on the way to the hospital in the ambulance, Deputy Snell issued a citation to the father for **Personal Flotation Device Not Worn by a Child under the Age of 6**.

It is believed that due to the state of panic both parents were in and the strong current in the river at the time of the incident, Deputies Snell and Burkhart prevented a tragedy with their quick and decisive actions during this incident.

#### **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, ran unopposed in 2016, and remains accountable to them.