



## Hernando County Sheriff's Office

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

### Media Release

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

**Re:** Update - Suspect in Custody After Stabbing at Mariner and Cortez

**Date:** February 24, 2021

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#### Update

Investigation revealed the victim and the suspect were both transients and did not know one another.

The victim and the suspect became engaged in a verbal altercation regarding panhandling on the corner. During the altercation, the suspect became physically aggressive and began pushing the victim. The victim fell to the ground.

While falling, the victim felt a “burning or stinging” sensation on the side of his neck. Detecting a large amount of blood in the area of his face and neck, the victim realized he’d been stabbed. While still on the ground, the victim observed the suspect running eastbound from the scene.

Deputies stopped and detained the suspect, later identified as Leah Victoria Barrett, in the area of Cortez Boulevard and Fish Eagle Boulevard. During a weapons search of her person, deputies located a stainless steel steak knife in her right front pocket. This knife had what appeared to be blood on it. Deputies also located a hunting-style knife with a six-inch blade inside Barrett’s backpack. Barrett does not possess a Concealed Weapons Permit.

While speaking with detectives regarding the incident, Barrett changed her story a few times; however, she did say she “stuck him” when asked about the bloody substance on the knife deputies located in her pocket.

Barrett then became uncooperative with detectives.

**Leah Victoria Barrett (aka/Lee) DOB/07-05-1988** was placed under arrest and charged as follows:

- Aggravated Battery w/a Deadly Weapon
- Carrying a Concealed Weapon
- Bond – \$11,000.

The victim's injuries were deemed to be not life-threatening.

The investigation continues.

### **Original Information – 02-23-2021**

On 02-23-2021 just after 1 p.m., Hernando County Sheriff's deputies along with Hernando County Fire and Emergency Services (HCFES) responded to the area of Mariner Boulevard and Cortez Boulevard (alongside the Walgreens) regarding a male on the ground, who was reportedly bleeding from his face.

Upon arrival, deputies observed a male on the sidewalk; the male was bleeding profusely from his upper body.

Preliminary investigation revealed the male had been stabbed. Witnesses provided a description and direction of travel for the female suspect.

Deputies quickly located the suspect walking eastbound on Cortez Boulevard and placed her into custody. The suspect is currently being interviewed by detectives. There are no other known suspects at large and there is no threat to the community.

The victim was treated on scene by HCFES then transported to a local trauma center. His condition is unknown at this time.

It is believed the victim and the suspect were not known to each other.

As a reminder, it is early in the investigation; the information provided is preliminary and subject to change.

Additional information will be provided when available.

### ***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 was re-elected in 2020. Sheriff Nienhuis remains accountable to the people of Hernando County.***