



Hernando County Sheriff's Office

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Media Release

From: Michael Terry
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Re: Search Warrant – Illegal Gambling – Sweeps

Date: May 25, 2021

On 05-21-2021 at 12:11 a.m., the Hernando County Sheriff's Office Vice and Narcotics Unit executed a search warrant at 3069 Anderson Snow Road in Spring Hill. The business, "Sweeps," was an illegal gambling "game room."

The Sheriff's Office has been working for months to educate the owners and operators of these establishments to work within the Florida State Statute (law).

Businesses were provided a "cease and desist" letter advising them they are operating illegally, allowing the owners to adjust their operations to comply with Florida Statute. Several establishments changed their practices or shut down completely.

An investigation revealed Sweeps was operating in violation of Florida State Statute, and detectives also noted narcotics activity in and around the business.

Upon execution of the search warrant, two employees, **Thomas Deruedas DOB/10-09-1998** and **Johnny Mendez DOB/07-25-1996**, were each charged with **Keeping a Gambling House**, Florida State Statute 849.01 and **Possession of a Slot Machine**. They were transported to the Hernando County Detention Center where their bonds were set at \$2,000 each.

During the execution of the search warrant, detectives seized \$19,187 in cash and various gambling machines.

More than a dozen patrons were observed on scene and actively gambling. The Hernando County Sheriff's Office educated the patrons explaining that they too can be charged with a crime for participating in these game rooms. The patrons were issued warnings and released on scene.

Additionally, one patron was arrested on various drug charges.

Charles Townsend DOB/05-28-1969 was charged with **Possession of a Controlled Substance, Possession of Marijuana, Introduction of Contraband into a Detention Center, and Possession of Paraphernalia**. His bond was set at \$6,000.

While these types of establishments are considered enjoyment by some citizens, they also attract a criminal element to the area. Drug use and sales, weapons disturbances, fights, and robberies are known to occur at these types of establishments.

This creates a safety concern for the patrons and employees of these game rooms, as well as the surrounding businesses and neighborhoods. The Sheriff's Office will continue to investigate other businesses in violation of Florida gambling laws, and we are committed to educating our citizens on the matter.

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.