



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: Sheriff Announces “Project Safe Return”

Date: November 2, 2021

In an effort to better serve the most vulnerable citizens of Hernando County, Sheriff Al Nienhuis is announcing the implementation of **Project Safe Return (PSR)**.

Project Safe Return is an initiative designed to assist law enforcement officers with identification and facilitation of the safe return (home), of individuals suffering from cognitive and/or behavioral disorders (Autism, Dementia, Alzheimer’s Disease, etc.), if they have wandered away from home or become lost.

Law enforcement agencies regularly receive calls reporting an elderly person wandering or going door-to-door attempting to find their home and/or a child walking the streets in only pajamas. Upon making contact with the elderly person, he or she may be very confused and unable to provide a current address. When law enforcement encounters a child in this case, he or she may be non-verbal or have a very limited vocabulary. Again, the deputy is unable to obtain the address where the child lives.

Our hope, with the implementation PSR, is to have a resource for caregivers (parent, adult children, any responsible party) to share information with the Hernando County Sheriff’s Office (HCSO) that will assist law enforcement in rapidly identifying and returning the individual to his or her home.

How Project Safe Return Works

- A family member or caregiver of the “Participant” logs on to the HCSO website to access the PSR database to complete the on-line application. The application requests a plethora of information, including recent photos, on the Participant. The application also requests emergency contact information for at least two caregivers, physician information, and diagnosis (if applicable).
- If law enforcement is dispatched to a call for service involving a person who appears to have a cognitive/behavioral disorder, a query of PSR data is conducted to ascertain

a match. Queries of data such as geographical location, approximate age, photos, and/or physical description can be used to find a match.

- Typically, the database would be utilized when a person leaves without being detected and is located by law enforcement before the caregiver discovers he or she is missing.
- The caregiver is urged to update the file at least once every six months to:
 - Verify all information is still correct
 - Replace older photos with new photos. Children grow quickly and their appearance may change. Supplying current photos is vital.

Sheriff Al Nienhuis said, “One of the most frustrating situations for law enforcement is to find an uncommunicative adult or child who is obviously lost. This program will allow us to re-unite our vulnerable citizens with their caregivers much faster. Reunification reduces everyone’s fear and frustration, while also saving time and tax dollars. We strongly encourage everyone reading this to share this information with friends and family members who must care for an at-risk child or adult.”

How To Access the PSR Portal

- Go to the Hernando County Sheriff’s Office website at www.hernandosheriff.org
- Click on **Citizen Resources**
- Click on **Other**
- Click on **Project Safe Return**.

It is requested that all Hernando County residents who care for someone with a cognitive/behavioral disorder complete the application, even if you believe the information is already on file at the HCSO.

Please direct any questions regarding **Project Safe Return** to Community Relations at 352-797-3689.

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.