



Hernando County Sheriff's Office

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Media Release

From: Denise M. Moloney
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Re: Arrest Made in Library Fire

Date: July 22, 2013

On 07-06-13, the Hernando County Sheriff's Office, along with Hernando County Fire/Rescue, responded to the East Hernando Branch Library, located at 6457 Windmere Road in Brooksville, regarding a structure fire on the rear screened in porch area.

Upon arrival, firefighters observed suspicious circumstances surrounding the fire and believed that someone may have set the fire.

Deputies and firefighters also observed a male, later identified as Joseph Michael Brannen, to be in the immediate area of the fire, wearing bunker gear (gear work by firefighters when fighting a fire). When questioned by deputies about this, Brannen explained that he wanted to be a volunteer firefighter so he purchased the bunker gear from e-Bay. He stated that he heard the call go out over his scanner, so he responded. Brannen was not permitted to assist in fighting the fire.

Authorities estimated the damage to the library to be in excess of \$500,000.

The circumstances surrounding the incident led investigators with the Hernando County Sheriff's Office and the State Fire Marshall's Office to believe that Joseph Brannen may have additional information regarding the incident.

On 07-15-13, detectives with the Hernando County Sheriff's Office contacted Brannen, by phone, and requested to meet with him regarding his involvement in this incident. He advised that he was "unavailable" and would be out of town for six weeks. When questioned about his whereabouts, it was learned that he was in Hillsborough County. Detectives advised they would arrange to visit him there.

On 07-17-13, Detective Royce Leggett went to Brannen's residence on Windmere Road in Brooksville. Brannen's aunt advised that he would be out of town for two weeks, but she would be more than happy to go and get him and bring him back for an interview with detectives, as he does not have a license to drive.

On 07-19-13, Joseph Brannen arrived at the Hernando County Sheriff's Office and engaged in a voluntary interview with investigators from the Hernando County Sheriff's Office and the State Fire Marshall's Office.

During the interview, Joseph admitted to setting the fire himself, stating that he wished to return to help extinguish it with the professional firefighters. He provided details as to how he entered the structure and how he set the fire without those details being provided by authorities.

Joseph Michael Brannen W/M DOB/03-31-1995 was charged with Arson and transported to the Hernando County Detention Center. His bond was set at \$3,000.

Photos from his Facebook page were placed into evidence, including self taken photos of himself in full bunker gear. He states on his Facebook page that he is employed by Hillsborough County Fire Rescue. During his interview, he stated that his intent by listing that WAS to work there, not that he actually did work there.