



Hernando County Sheriff's Office

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Media Release

From: Denise M. Moloney
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Re: Traffic Stop Leads to Arrest for Trafficking in Methamphetamine

Date: April 7, 2021

On 04-06-2021 at approximately 6:15 p.m., Deputy Trevor Jones was conducting a Security Check at the 7-Eleven convenience store located at 4710 Commercial Way in Spring Hill, when he observed a gold Ford Windstar minivan parked at one of the gas pumps.

Upon closer examination of the minivan, Deputy Jones observed the decal attached to the Florida tag was expired, as of February, 2008. A query of the Florida tag revealed it was no longer assigned to a vehicle and had been returned to the DHSMV in Pasco County.

The driver of the minivan, later identified as Thomas Abel, pulled away from the gas pumps, heading toward Berkeley Manor Boulevard and eventually onto Commercial Way.

As Abel proceeded southbound on Commercial Way passing Perkins restaurant, Deputy Jones conducted a Traffic Stop where he made contact with the driver, who identified himself as Thomas Abel via his Florida ID card.

Abel told the deputy “he found the tag at a house he’d been staying at” so he decided to attach it to the minivan. He also stated he’d recently purchased the minivan and it was not registered. Abel was unable to provide a title and/or a bill of sale to prove ownership of the vehicle.

Abel was removed from the minivan and detained in the deputy’s patrol vehicle.

When asked if there was anything illegal in the minivan, Abel’s response was, “There shouldn’t be.” Abel gave consent for a search of the minivan, advising there was a paint-ball gun between the driver and passenger seats.

A search of the minivan revealed the following items:

Two clear baggies containing a crystal-like substance, two cut straws, two baggies containing five white pills each, one clear baggie containing one pink pill, one clear glass smoking pipe, 16 clear baggies - each containing a brown powder-like substance, a large amount of clear, unused baggies and a digital scale.

Abel declined to speak to Deputy Jones regarding the items found inside his minivan.

Upon arrival at the detention center, all substances were tested and weighed. The results are as follows:

- The crystal-like substance tested positive for the presence of Methamphetamine. The items weighed 10.5 grams and 10.9 grams and were weighed without packaging.
- The brown power-like substance tested positive for the presence of Fentanyl. The total weight of the 16 baggies was 4.9 grams.
- The white round pills were Methadone Hydrochloride, a schedule 2 controlled substance.
- The pink pill was a Clonazepam, a schedule 4 controlled substance.

Thomas Abel DOB/12-14-1958 was charged as follows:

- Trafficking in Methamphetamine
- Trafficking in Controlled Substance
- Possession of Controlled Substance (2 counts)
- Possession of Drug Paraphernalia
- Knowingly Drive While License Suspended/Revoked
- Unregistered Motor Vehicle
- Bond - \$157,000.

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.