



## 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  
Public Relations Manager, 352-797-3609

**Re:** Update 1 - Detectives Investigating Drowning of Two Cave Divers – 2022-18414

**Date:** June 23, 2022

---

#### Update

Detectives were able to locate a family member of the second victim. Next-of-kin notification has been made. The second victim is identified as **Stephen Roderick Gambrell DOB/07-24-1958**.

#### Original Information

On 06-22-22 at approximately 12:20 p.m., a 9-1-1 call was placed to the Hernando County Sheriff's Office regarding a possible Drowning. The location provided was "Buford Springs Cave" which lies in the Chassahowitzka Wildlife Park at 13243 Commercial Way in Weeki Wachee. The 9-1-1 caller was one of three juveniles (ages 15, 15, and 17) who arrived at the park around 9 a.m., to swim and hang out by the water.

At approximately 11 a.m., two adult males arrived. As the adults prepared for their dive, they chatted with the juveniles. Both adults then entered the water and dove for a short time before resurfacing.

When the adults resurfaced, they engaged in conversation with one another. The juveniles believed the discussion was in regards to going back down into the "cave" and whether or not they had enough air in their tanks to complete their dive. One of the divers is believed to have mentioned that he possibly had a leak in his tank. After a short time, both adults dove back down under the water.

A short while later, the juveniles observed one of the divers come to the surface. The diver was floating face down, which the juveniles believed he was doing purposely, to look for the other diver who had yet to resurface.

Before long, the juveniles noticed there were no bubbles coming to the surface, like there had been earlier. The juveniles swam over to check on him and received no response. The three juveniles were able to get the diver over to the dock, but were unable to lift him out of the water.

Upon arrival, Deputies N. Burburan and J. Balafas jumped into the water, and together, lifted the diver onto the dock. The diver was obviously deceased.

Deputies waited for the other diver to come to the surface. Knowing the divers discussed the amount of air in their tanks, deputies believed he would be surfacing any minute, as he would be running out of air.

As time passed and the second diver did not surface, it was surmised that he most likely experienced some type of problem in the cave.

Several members of the International Underwater Cave Rescue and Recovery (IUCRR) responded to the scene to attempt a recovery mission for the second diver. These highly specialized cave divers entered the water and began the search for the second diver.

The IUCRR divers located the second diver approximately 137 feet below the surface. Obviously deceased, the diver was recovered and brought to the surface.

Neither of the divers had any obvious signs of trauma and both appeared to have the appropriate diving equipment. It is unknown at this time if all the equipment was working properly.

Both victims were turned over to the Medical Examiner.

Detectives located identification, belonging to both victims, inside the vehicle in which they arrived. Next-of-kin notifications were made with the first victim's family.

The first victim has been identified as Todd Richard McKenna DOB/04-20-1970.

The investigation continues.

### *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.*