

LOCAL & STATE

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Coast Guard searching for missing single engine plane

CEDAR KEY, Fla. (AP) — The U.S. Coast Guard is searching for a small plane the failed to show up at its destination along Florida's Gulf coast.

Officials said in a news release that three people were on board the single-engine plane that left Brooksville on Sunday. A missing plane report was filed just after 5 p.m. when the plane failed to show up in Cedar Key.

The Coast Guard says the Air Force Rescue Coordination Center reported the plane was last spotted on radar at 11:06 a.m. Sunday, when it was some seven miles south of Cedar Key.

A flight plan was not filed for the plane. Crews from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Levy County Fire and Rescue and Cedar Key Fire and Rescue assisted in the search.

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Editor's Note:

Additional reports state that the occupants of the aircraft were 65 year old Jasper Jerrel, his 17 year old son and Hugh Singletary, 60. Jerrels is the President of Bay Area Glass & Door Services.

Breakthrough for Sheriff's Budget increase?

by BARRY DURMAZ

Sheriff's Office Public Safety Workshop

In the Hernando County Commissioners' chamber on February 7, 2017, the Sheriff's Office presented a workshop on Public Safety. The workshop is to be understood in light of Sheriff Al Nienhuis' petition to finance his budget by an additional \$1.7 million over the FY 2016 budget—an increase the commissioners have previously declined and for which the Sheriff has filed a lawsuit against the county. As a pro-active countermeasure, Commissioner Steve Champion requested the sheriff to demonstrate how well they are doing with the funds they currently have while operating with fewer resources.

Prior to the Sheriff's Office presentation a discussion occurred on an amount of approximately \$900,000 in excess funds at the Sheriff's disposal.

Pam Lee, Budget Manager stated, "The Sheriff is required to give back any unspent funds and any earned revenue. That number was 900 and some odd thousand dollars. For this year, it is sitting in our balance forward cash." She clarified that \$350,000 was unspent funds and \$500,000 was earned revenues.

Dukes stated that it's not uncommon in a budget resolution to ask for the earned revenue to be put into the current budget.

Commissioner Champion questioned why the Sheriff's budget was reduced if there was an overall increase in general fund revenue due to property taxes. Pam Lee and Assistant County Administrator Len Sossamon explained the increase in revenue went towards a 19.5% increase in health benefits, a 3.5% union contract increase (county employee pay raises), the establishment of an aquatic services division and the opening of a women's clinic.

Commissioner Nicholson emphasized that the Sheriff has the option to spend excess funds. He just needs to come before the board to tell them what it's for.

It is important to keep in mind that the use of earned revenues, particularly by law enforcement has led to problems in the past. The City of Waldo's police department was disbanded in 2014 due to the setting of speed traps and illegal ticket quotas.

After introductory comments by Chief Deputy Colonel Michael Maurer, the Law Enforcement Operations Bureau, headed by

Major James Terry, presented insightful data from the Patrol Division, Vice & Narcotics Division, and Major Cases Section. That was followed by Animal Enforcement, Emergency Management, Sexual Offender Tracking, and Judicial Services.

For the Patrol Division, calls for service have increased from 2011 to 2016 by 26.80%. Yet manpower to service these calls remain unchanged. "This is not a sustainable model," warns Major Terry. "We cannot have an increase in calls and population and not have an increase in people. I have my people running around like crazy trying to get things done!"

Sexual offenders/predators rose from 317 people in 2010 to 416 people in February 2017, an increase of 31.23%. "These are people we are responsible for keeping an eye on to protect our citizens," Major Terry presses the Commissioners.

"We are arguing about \$1.7 million, and we need a lot more than that to be on average with other agencies," continues Major Terry. He then contrasted five area counties' law enforcement ratios with that of Hernando County—Alachua County Sheriff's Office: 2.61 officers per 1,000 population; Charlotte County: 2.05 officers per 1,000; Citrus County: 1.63 officers per 1,000; Indian River County: 2.3 officers per 1,000; and Martin County: 2.02 per 1,000. The average: 2.12

Hernando County Sheriff's Office: 1.29 officers per 1,000. In order for Hernando County Sheriff's Office to be average, 142 sworn officers would have to be added. The cost to add a 142 new deputies? \$9,249,738. "And that figure doesn't factor additional supervision, support staff, or existing employees a well deserved salary increase," so says Major James Terry.

The Deputy Major reiterated the 1.29 law enforcement

ratio of Hernando County, believing the Sheriff's Department is being deprived of needed officers.

This begs the questions, "Are the practices and financial resources of other county governments the basis for law enforcement in Hernando County? Is excellence in service tied to the amount of money a department of government has? Are the citizens of Hernando County willing to increase the governance and policing of themselves than that of surrounding counties?"

The Narcotics Division experienced an increasing trend in all activities under watch from 2015 to 2016—marijuana, heroin, hashish: 6.7%, 3620.78%, 584.62%, respectively.

Presented by Lieutenant Shaun Klucznik, the manager of Animal Enforcement and shelter from 2012 operated with an annual budget of \$755k. Accepting responsibility of Animal Enforcement, the Sheriff absorbed this function without requesting an increase in funding. This saved the county taxpayers approximately \$343k. The current annual budget to manage is \$341,981, which is \$1056 less than the original budget.

Confirming the animal shelter and management budget of \$1.3 million, Commissioner Champion stated, "This is one division that should fund itself between fines and registration fees. The irresponsible people should fund animal enforcement. There are tons of irresponsible people because every kennel is full."

Apparently, when HCSO took over management in 2013, the hold times for animal complaint calls averaged 103 minutes, based on 5474 animal complaints. By 2016 the Sheriff was able to handle an unwieldy 10,213 animal complaint calls for the year

while reducing call holds to 34 seconds.

Through the efforts of Director Cecilia Petella, the Emergency Management Division has been reduced from a Class 7 Community to a Class 5. The benefit? County citizens receive a 25% discount on their flood insurance premiums. Each Class decrease provides a 5% reduction in flood insurance. Director Petella hopes to reach Class 4 in 2017.

Under the leadership of Director Steve Porter, the Emergency Communication Center, Hernando County's 24 hr/365 days 911 Call Center, achieved notable efficiencies. In 2016 99.1% of calls were answered within 10 seconds or less. The state requires 90% of calls to be answered within 10 seconds or less.

Lastly, the Judicial Service Bureau, headed by Major Michael Page, has saved the county unprecedented amounts of money. When the Corrections Corporation of America (CCA) managed Judicial Services, they billed the county for 177 positions annually. HCSO runs it with 137, saving the county nearly \$16 million.

The 2011-12 budget was \$13 million. The 2016-17 budget, \$11,959,785. The jail is being operated at over \$1 million less today than in 2012.

Upon HCSO taking over Judicial Services, medical cost saving was implemented by Director DeKany. Two full-time nurses with salaries and benefits were replaced with contract EMT/Paramedics at \$16 per hour. The last three years has yielded a savings of \$118,926.

Under Major Page's leadership, inmate fees for bookings, subsistence, medical admin, and SSI claims that were collected and turned over to the County Commissioners during 2011-2016 are \$1,717,369. An amount of \$292,000 was collected in 2016 alone. This was collected from only 30% of the inmate population. In contrast, the fees collected by the CCA in its last year of operation was \$29,000.

"This speaks volumes, doesn't it, Major?" affirmed County Commissioner Chairman Wayne Dukes. "It does," replied Major Page.

The direction given at this meeting was to give the Sheriff the option of requesting his earned revenues back from the Board each month at a regularly scheduled meeting through a budget resolution which would be placed on the consent agenda.

