



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Traveling Burglars Nabbed by Relentless Deputies and Detectives**

(Citrus County) For more than a year now, several Citrus County businesses and homes have been burglarized in a similar manner. In these cases, the burglars were three young black males who would come into our county in a rented or stolen car. They would then force their way into businesses or homes (usually in the rear of the property) and steal valuables. In some cases, in addition to valuables, they would steal the victim's vehicle and use it to escape.

Due to the increased number of cases, all sworn personnel were urged to be diligent in their patrols and to increase their presence in all of our neighborhoods.

"Other counties all over Florida were experiencing these types of burglaries," said Captain Brad Smith of the East Patrol District. "We were gathering intelligence and learned about a network coming out of Orlando that was highly organized and pretty efficient at burglaries. We directed all of our patrol deputies to be extremely active in the neighborhoods that were getting hit. Ultimately, their diligence paid off for us."

Det. Steve Farkas, a community crimes detective (CCD) on the East side of the county, became involved in several of these investigations in February. His first case involved a home in Citrus Hills in which the suspects entered through the back pool door and retrieved a laptop. Thankfully, no one was home at the time.

Det. Lahera, another CCD on the East side, received a case in which a Citrus Hills home was burglarized while the homeowners were home. A laptop was stolen in the middle of the night using a rear entry.

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Det. Chenoweth, a CCD on the West side of the county, received cases from the Riverhaven area that were similar in nature.

They all worked together to determine how they could possibly catch these criminals.

The second case for Farkas came to him in April. This time, three black males entered the rear of the home while the occupants, a husband and wife, were asleep. They spent at least two hours in the home, stealing multiple electronic items, debit and credit cards, watches, power tools, a gun and to seal the deal, they stole the couple's vehicle filled with everything they had just taken from them.

"I was extremely disturbed when I watched this video," Det. Farkas said. "It made me angry to think that these people were driving up here to victimize innocent people in my town. It motivated me to catch them."

In the meantime, other Florida counties were experiencing the same issues -- multiple nighttime burglaries with rear entries in which the suspects were black males with Orlando addresses in a rental or stolen vehicle. It didn't matter if people were in the home sleeping.

"Everyone in the agency was told to be diligent in our efforts to catch those committing these crimes," Det. Lahera said. "These guys hit nice neighborhoods -- even gated communities -- with no fear whatsoever," he continued.

On April 23, with these crimes in mind, Dep. Indorato and Dep. Laborda strategically placed themselves near the Citrus/Sumter County line to wait for those trying to enter our county that might be up to no-good. Dep. Indorato noticed a car attempting an illegal turn on Hwy 44 East. When he tried to stop the vehicle, those inside wouldn't stop. A pursuit ensued and ended in Sumter County. All three occupants, young black males, were arrested for fleeing and eluding. They matched the description of those committing burglaries here and in other areas, and although no one confessed, we believe the efforts of Dep. Indorato and Dep. Laborda may have prevented further crimes from being committed in our community.

On April 25, patrol deputies made the magic happen again. A homeowner called to report a burglary in progress and because deputies were purposefully providing extra patrols in targeted neighborhoods, they were close by. Dep. Blotz, a keen-eyed patrol deputy, pulled a car over for excessive speeding. There were three black males in the vehicle and one of those inside had a warrant out for his arrest for burglary. All three were arrested for possession of burglary tools.

Det. Farkas then had his chance at interviewing these three different suspects. After a few hours with Farkas, two of the three men confessed to the crimes for his two cases. They also confessed to five burglaries in Winter Haven in Polk County.

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“The sad thing is,” he said, “there will be no recovery of the stolen items. These guys sell the stuff back in Orlando as soon as they can get their hands on it. But at least they’re behind bars.”

“Citrus County has a history of stopping these criminals when they come into our county, as evidenced by the arrests we were made on the Dodge Dealership burglaries and the cell phone store burglaries,” Capt. Smith said. “Without the persistence of our deputies and detectives, those arrests wouldn’t have happened.”

“Our message is pretty clear,” said Sheriff Mike Prendergast. “We’re not going to tolerate this in our community. I don’t want this happening in any county – but if you come here, we’re waiting on you.”

“We’re immensely proud of the way our deputies, detectives and intelligence analysts have handled this situation,” he said. “In the meantime, help us help you by locking your homes, protecting your valuables and setting your alarms. These people are not afraid to go into your home. But you can bank on the fact that we will continue to be diligent to protect you.”

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