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Man arrested for murder in Cedar Key



Matthew Thomas Whyte
Mug Shot by LCSO

By LCSO Lt. Scott Tummond
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CEDAR KEY -- At 11:55 p.m. on Sunday (Dec. 30), the Levy County Sheriff's Office 9-1-1 Center received an emergency call.

A Cedar Key man reported to a third party that he had witnessed a murder and frantically asked for law enforcement to be called.

Cedar Key Police Department was the first

on scene where they spoke to the witness.

This initial witness interview led police officers to 3011 D St., where they discovered the victim's body lying face down in the edge of the water behind this home. Cedar Key Police additionally located and detained another potential witness and an individual suspected of causing the death.

Cedar Key Police Chief Virgil Sandlin responded to the scene and contacted the Levy County Sheriff's Office Criminal Investigations Division (CID) for assistance.

The Levy County Sheriff's Office CID personnel and the LCSO Crime Scene Unit responded to the scene. Shortly after arrival, Chief Sandlin asked the LCSO on scene CID supervisor to assume responsibility for this investigation. The following investigation led to the arrest of one person, Matthew Whyte, 27, of Cedar Key for first degree murder.

Investigators learned earlier that evening of Dec. 30, Whyte, an eyewitness, Whyte's roommate and the victim, identified as Thomas Rafferty, 55, were all hanging out and drinking together. The four men, who were all acquainted with each other, live next door to each other.

The eyewitness reported he and Whyte's roommate got into an argument that was eventually broken up by Whyte.

Whyte left the home for several hours and when he returned Rafferty was still instigating the argument. Rafferty wanted the eyewitness to fight Whyte's roommate.

Whyte, as the investigation determined, was under the influence of methamphetamine, and he became irate with Rafferty and punched him.

The eyewitness stepped in between the two and separated them. When the eyewitness stepped away, Whyte kicked Rafferty knocking him backwards out of a doorway which led onto the back-deck area of the home.

A second kick by Whyte toppled Rafferty over the railing causing him to fall approximate six feet onto the shell encrusted marsh area.

The eyewitness reported that Whyte then jumped down into the marsh area, picked up a board and struck Rafferty twice.

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Whyte then dragged the victim to the edge of the waterline, dropped him face down and held Rafferty's face in the water until he drowned.

Evidence identified at the scene confirmed the eyewitness' account of the murder. Additional evidence was discovered after a search warrant was served at Whyte's home.

Whyte was booked in at the Levy County Detention Facility for First Degree Murder and is being held on NO BOND. An additional charge of possession of a drug without a prescription was made against Whyte and bond was set at \$50,000 for that charge.

Investigators are still conducting interviews and anyone who has information is asked to contact LCSO Investigator C.J. Perryman at 352-486-5111 extension 276.

This story was first published Dec. 31, 2018 at 4:18 p.m. with fewer details.