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DCSO catches suspected arsonist from Chiefland

Resident of Chiefland house incident arrested in Dixie County

By Jeff M. Hardison © April 26, 2023 at 1:30 p.m.

TALLAHASSEE – In the early morning hours of April 25, deputies with the Dixie County Sheriff's Office responded to a structure fire in the community of Suwannee, next to the Gulf of Mexico, according to information sent by DCSO Sgt. Amy Evans.

While on the way to the scene DCSO Deputy B. Stone observed a vehicle driven by a white male matching the description of the suspect provided by a witness, Evans said.

Deputy Stone made contact with the suspect, who later fled, resulting in a high-speed chase that ended with the suspect driving his vehicle into the Suwannee River at the Anderson Boat Ramp, across the river from the Town of Fanning Springs.

The vehicle drifted downstream, got stuck on a branch, and began to sink. As the truck sank, the suspect made his way to shore, where he was placed under arrest and transported to the Dixie County Jail.

Sea Tow and Tri-County Towing & Recovery were called to remove the vehicle from the river.

Due to the nature of items found at another arson scene connected to this suspect, as well as items found inside the vehicle, Alachua County Sheriff's Office (ACSO) Bomb Squad and State Fire Marshal were requested and deployed, Evans said.

As a result of this incident, George Hartshorn of Chiefland was charged with first degree arson; fleeing or attempting to elude (high speed) and officer; leaving the scene of a crash involving damage; dumping of litter; two counts of aggravated assault on a law enforcement officer; two counts of resisting an officer with violence; criminal mischief with damage estimated between \$200 and \$1,000; discharging a firearm from a vehicle; and possession of a fire bomb, Evans said,

At this time, he is being held in the Dixie County Jail with no bond, she added.

A spokeswoman at the Florida's Fire Marshal's Office in Tallahassee said on Wednesday morning (April 26) that information would be sent about the investigation the Fire Marshal's Office started on April 25 in Chiefland, however that has not proved to be true.

As for any lingering danger, the Chiefland Police Department noted the area is safe and the residence at 205 N.E. Second St. has been cleared of any dangerous objects found there.

The CPD noted objects "were dismantled by authorities and were not of calamitous nature."

As for Dixie County Sheriff Darby Butler and the DCSO, Evans noted the sheriff thanks the Florida Department of Corrections K9 Team, the ACSO Bomb Squad, Sea Tow, Tri-County Towing & Recovery, the State Fire Marshal's Office, and other law enforcement officers involved, and that he appreciates all their help.