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## More details released about suspected arsonist *Press secretary says some records sealed*

George Henry Hartshorn  
Mugshot and Other Photos  
Provided – Courtesy DCSO

By Jeff M. Hardison ©  
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**CROSS CITY**

– Information about the arrest of a 61-year-old Chiefland man suspected of arson and other crimes was released from the Dixie County Sheriff's Office this afternoon (Thursday, April 27).



**(Please see related stories on the Home Page.)**

Also on April 27, Press Secretary Ryan Walker in the Communications Office of Florida Chief Financial Officer Jimmy Patronis said that the State Fire Marshal's Office (which is under CFO Patronis) cannot yet release records from its involvement in the April 25 investigation in Chiefland.

This remains an open investigation, as of April 27, Press Secretary Walker said, and the records are excluded from view by the public and the press because of that exclusionary rule within Florida's open records laws, where records from active investigations are excluded.

Very briefly, "The active criminal investigative and intelligence exemption is limited in scope; its purpose is to prevent premature disclosure of information when such disclosure could impede an ongoing investigation or allow a suspect to avoid apprehension or escape detection," according to the **2022 Florida's Government-In-The-Sunshine Manual And Public Records Law Manual**, written and prepared by The Office Of Florida Attorney General Ashley Moody.

Press Secretary Walker estimated this investigation should allow records to be "unsealed" within a couple of weeks.

Meanwhile DCSO Sgt. Amy Evans, the public information officer in the office of Dixie County Sheriff Darby Butler, quickly and easily complied with a request for certain public records from that agency's involvement with certain alleged crimes from a couple of days ago.

### **The Incidents Leading To Arrest**

George Henry Hartshorn, 61, of 405 N.E. Second St., in the City of Chiefland, was arrested in Dixie County at 8:03 a.m. April 25 on the charges of first degree arson; fleeing in an attempt to elude a police officer; leaving the scene of an accident involving property damage; discharge of a firearm from a vehicle; possession of a fire bomb; two counts of aggravated assault on a law enforcement officer; two counts of resisting arrest with violence; criminal mischief with damage between \$200 and \$1,000, according to records.

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The arrest report detailing what led to Hartshorn being put in the Dixie County Jail, with no bond, showed the following.

On April 25 at approximately 7:10 a.m., DCSO Deputy B. Stone was dispatched to a camper on fire in the community of Suwannee (near to the Gulf of Mexico in Dixie County), according to records.

The complainant told the DCSO dispatcher that an explosion was heard and “an older white male wearing all black clothing” was seen

walking from the area of the camper, which was now on fire, and the man entered a four-door Ford F-150 pickup truck, according to records.



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As the deputy went to respond to the call, he saw a truck and man fitting the description was driving it, according to records.

Deputy Stone turned around and stopped the pickup by using lights and siren, which were still activated from his responding to the call about the camper fire, according to records.

Hartshorn pulled the truck over to the right shoulder of the road and stopped, Stone noted.

The deputy saw a long lighter and forward looking infrared night vision goggles in the vehicle. He asked Hartshorn where he was coming from and the man said Suwannee, Stone noted in the arrest report.

Hartshorn said he was weed-eating when the deputy asked what he was doing in Suwannee, and that the weed-eater was in the bed of the truck, which was covered, according to records.

When the deputy asked about the night-vision equipment, the man said he uses it for birdwatching.

When the deputy asked about watching birds at night, Hartshorn said he does so early in the morning, according to records.

After some more interaction with Hartshorn, the man drove away at a high rate of speed, according to records, and the deputy began a pursuit.

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Another deputy joined in the chase, according to records.

The pickup truck reached speeds of up to 100 mph as the suspect fled from the deputies, according to records, including when he sped through an active school zone.

During the chase, too, the pickup truck almost collided with a deputy's cruiser, according to records.

During part of the chase, the fleeing suspected felon hit traffic signs, according to records.

Eventually Hartshorn drove the pickup eastbound on Southeast 155th Avenue, where the driver continued to drive it into the Suwannee River at the boat ramp of Joe H. Anderson Sr. Park and Boat Ramp, according to records.

The two deputies got out of their cruisers, drew their weapons for a felony stop, and

loudly and clearly commanded the driver to exit the vehicle with his hands up, according to records.

Hartshorn held a black pistol out the window of the pickup truck, waving it toward the deputies, and he told the deputies he was going to have a cigarette, according to records. Repeated commands to drop the weapon were refused as the truck began to sink, according to records.

As Deputy Stone approached the sinking truck from the riverbank, he heard what he strongly believes were several gunshots coming from within the truck, according to records.

Hartshorn still refused to drop the pistol and appeared to be making a



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call on his cellphone, according to records.

When the pickup sank, Hartshorn exited and came to shore, where he was placed in handcuffs, according to records.

Sea Tow recovered the vehicle and brought it back upstream to the boat ramp, according to records. As Sea Tow was bringing in the truck, the deputies learned Hartshorn's house in Chiefland had caught fire, but the fire was contained, according to records.

At least one unexploded firebomb was found, according to records.

Upon inventory of the recovered pickup truck, a .38 caliber pistol was found, according to records. Bullets for the gun were found in the possession of Hartshorn, according to records.

Also recovered by Deputy Stone were three mortar style of fireworks, taped together with detonation cords braided; and several containers appearing to be homemade explosive devices, according to records.

The Alachua County Sheriff's Office Bomb Squad cleared the vehicle and deemed to be safe from any other devices, according to records.

Tri-County Towing and Recovery took the truck to the DCSO impound lot, according to records.