

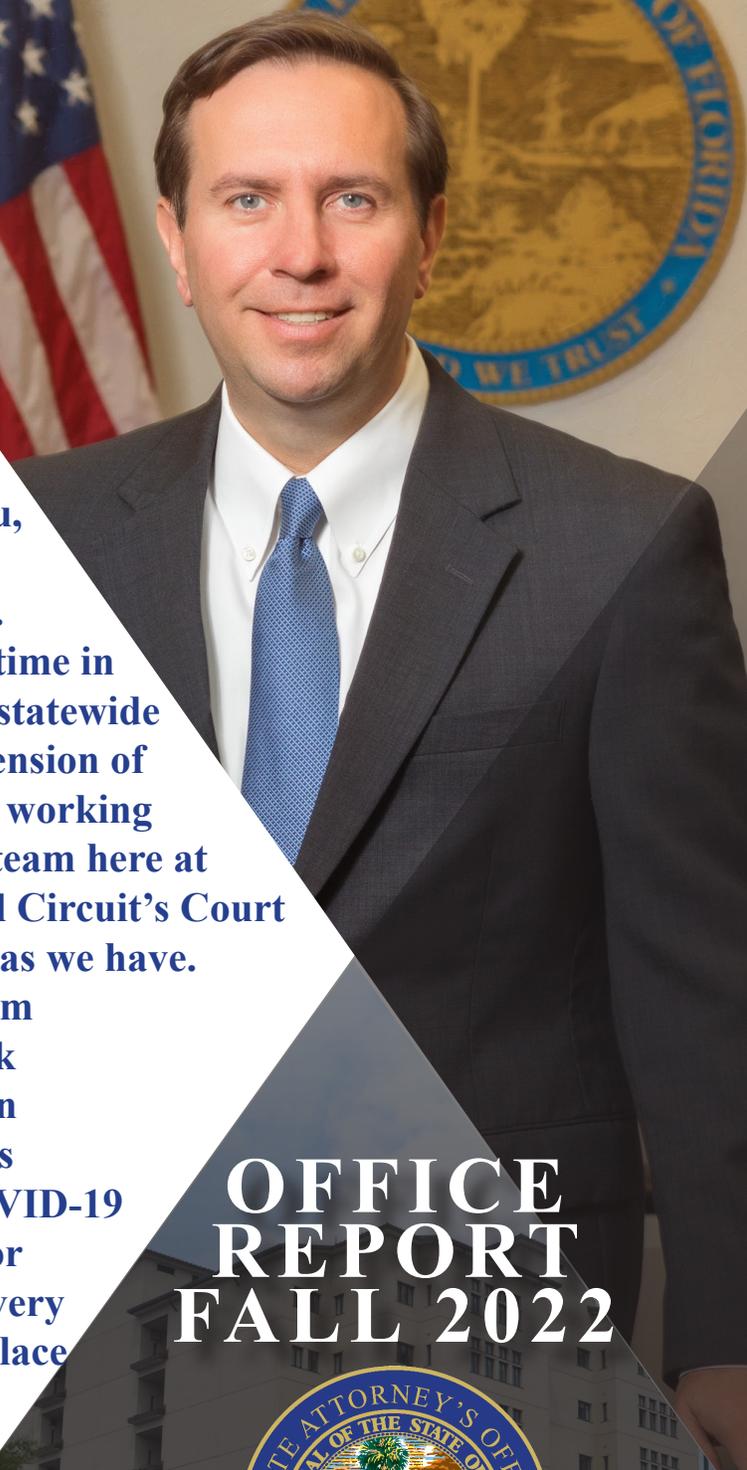
A LETTER FROM YOUR STATE ATTORNEY:

I am pleased to provide you with this update regarding the hard work of our prosecutors, investigators and staff who I have the honor of serving with as the State Attorney for the Tenth Judicial Circuit of Florida. Since my last report to you, much has happened. In March of 2020, the world stopped, however the criminals did not. What followed was an extremely challenging time in the criminal justice system, complicated by a statewide prohibition of in-court appearances, the suspension of jury trials and a case backlog that we are still working through today. It's because of the incredible team here at the SAO and our partners in the 10th Judicial Circuit's Court System that we have been able to come as far as we have. While many places in the Florida Court System were shut down or significantly curtailed, Polk Highlands and Hardee Counties led the way in returning to dealing with the people's business in-person, where it belongs. We didn't let COVID-19 be used as an excuse not to continue to look for ways to improve our system, while working every day to ensure that our community is a great place to live, work and visit. As we approach the end of 2022 and look ahead to 2023, I'm excited to continue the work that you see highlighted in the pages of this report.

Sincerely,



BRIAN HAAS
STATE ATTORNEY



OFFICE REPORT FALL 2022



BRIAN HAAS
STATE ATTORNEY
10TH CIRCUIT
*Polk, Hardee and
Highlands Counties*



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HARDEE



POLK



HIGHLANDS

The Office of the State Attorney, 10th Judicial Circuit, represents the people of the State of Florida in all criminal prosecutions in Polk, Highlands and Hardee Counties. This office also advises the grand juries for those three counties.

Additionally, this office's Child Support Enforcement Division establishes and reinforces Title IV-D laws.



43,659 cases handled



20 agencies send us cases



\$1M collected in Child Support



ASA SPOTLIGHT



ASSISTANT STATE ATTORNEY HAROLD BENNETT

Harold Bennett has a passion for serving his community and giving victims who feel voiceless the justice they deserve. After graduating from Winter Haven High School, Harold attended Morehouse College, Atlanta, Georgia where he earned his Bachelor of Arts in International Studies and minored in Religion. He then went on to obtain his Juris Doctor from Florida State University College of Law in 2002, and returned to earn his Doctor of Ministry in Pastoral Counseling in 2017. Harold has been with the SAO for nine years and currently serves as a



Chief. "I love it because it gives me an opportunity to teach new felony prosecutors qualities that I learned from my mentors, one of which is to always be professional; and the goal of our job is to seek justice." When Harold isn't at the office, he enjoys spending time with his wife, Loundy, and two beautiful daughters, reading and playing golf. Harold received the *Honorable Oliver and Mona Spirit of Giving Award* from the Lakeland Bar Association in 2022 and is a member of the Florida Bar's William Reece Leadership Academy.

ASSISTANT STATE ATTORNEY JENNIFER ORDONEZ

Friends and family said law school would be a good degree to have and would open doors for her future. Little did Jennifer Ordonez know she would want to practice criminal law after a judicial internship in law school with two Hillsborough County judges who were both on the criminal bench. It was during that semester of exposure to the criminal court system that Jennifer realized she wanted to be a prosecutor. Jennifer Ordonez, graduated from the University of Florida and attended Stetson Law School. She has been with the SAO for thirteen years



and has worked in misdemeanor, felony, homicide and the intake division where she is currently assigned. Jennifer is extremely meticulous and analyzes each criminal case submitted to the State Attorney's Office. She truly appreciates the ability to work on the prosecution from its inception and the fast pace on-call duties that come along with it. When she is not working Jennifer enjoys spending time with her family and cooking.

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COMMUNITY OUTREACH

In June, we hosted our annual mock trial program for high school students who are interested in pursuing a legal career.

Ten students joined us for a week-long program. We covered how the court systems work, and students were able to learn from prosecutors about what it takes to prepare a case for trial.

Each student was assigned a role as a prosecutor, bailiff, witness and judge in the courtroom. Students worked alongside prosecutors to prepare opening and closing statements and discuss best practices for examining and cross-examining witnesses. During the mock trial, students presented their opening statements, questioned witnesses, and gave closing arguments in a courtroom with a jury made up of employees from this office, who found the defendant guilty.



**YOUTH MOCK TRIAL
SUMMER PROGRAM**



The 10th Judicial Circuit's 2021
**STATE ATTORNEY'S CITIZENS
ACADEMY**



We are pleased to announce the State Attorney's Office has completed our 2nd Citizens Academy. This Academy gives residents of the Tenth Judicial Circuit an opportunity to learn more about the criminal justice system. Participants hear from many prosecutors from various divisions and concludes the Academy by observing a mock trial. State Attorney Brian Haas would like to thank all the prosecutors who took time out of their daily task to make this Academy a great success: Jacob Orr, Ashley McCarthy, Nicole Orr, Tammy Glotfelt, Mikaela Perry, Michael Nutter, Paul Wallace, Harold Bennett, Bonde Johnson and Dr. Nelson.

Dr. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. PARADE

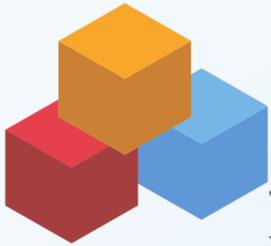


NATIONAL NIGHT OUT WITH THE LAKELAND POLICE DEPARTMENT



COMMUNITY

CONNECTIONS



Throughout 2021 and 2022, State Attorney Brian Haas visited many schools to help inform our future leaders about the different functions of the State Attorney's Office. Assistant State Attorney Harold Bennett and Investigator Chad McConchie has also attended multiple schools with Mr. Haas.



State Attorney Brian Haas visits Community Service Clubs around the circuit to speak about the SAO.



FRAUD PREVENTION

One of the main reasons fraud occurs is simply because there was an opportunity to do so. State Attorney Brian Haas is dedicated to helping keep communities in our circuit safe, and one way he does that is by educating residents so they can prevent crimes before they happen.

DON'T FALL VICTIM TO FRAUD

- Don't give personal info over the phone.
- Shred documents instead of ripping them.
- Don't use your mailbox to send important documents or money.



WHAT CAN YOU DO TO PROTECT YOUR PERSONAL INFORMATION?

- Use care when dealing with important documents that contain sensitive information
- Be cautious when providing your social security number
- Don't believe emails offering you prizes or money
- Be wary of attachments from email addresses you don't know
- Don't give personal information over the phone
- When calling your bank, dial the number on the back of your debit card: this ensures to whom you are speaking with
- Don't fall for the "Family Member" scam: Phone scammers may call you and pretend to be a family member who is in trouble. They do this to try and trick you into sending money or giving them access to your accounts.
- The IRS will not ask for account information by phone: Hang up immediately

**SCAM
ALERT**
!

JUSTICE FOR VETERANS

Veterans Courts

Our Veterans have given so much to protect the freedoms that we enjoy in the United States of America. So often, service in the military has lasting impacts on our veterans. While some may expect returning service members to “flip the switch” and return to the life they had before their service, we know that to be an unrealistic expectation. Here in the Tenth Judicial Circuit, we have a special program to help veterans who have been charged with crimes that relate to a condition they are dealing with because of their military service. Often, we see folks dealing with PTSD, substance abuse and other issues that lead to the commission of minor crimes and offenses.

The goal of our Veterans Treatment Program is to help the offender get the treatment services they are entitled to and get back on the right track. The program is rigorous and is supported by other veteran “mentors” from our community. If the veteran successfully completes our program, the State Attorney will agree to dismiss their criminal charges. The program has been incredibly successful. We’ve even had some participants come back and serve as mentors to other folks going through the program. We look forward to continuing to look for ways to expand and improve the way we serve those who served our country.



Speaker Col. Gary Clark (Ret.), head of the Veteran Council

Children Committing Crimes: A Problem that Impacts All of Us.



One of the most challenging and important issues facing the criminal justice system and our society as a whole is juvenile crime. The term invokes images of groups of teenagers breaking into cars and stealing whatever they can get their hands on. The juvenile crime problem is much deeper than car burglaries. A child committing crimes is often indicative of a much larger problem. A lack of parental support and guidance, substance abuse, getting involved with the wrong crowd and gang involvement are some of the leading causes of kids committing crimes. Our juvenile justice system cannot succeed as a “one-size-fits all” approach. Here in the Tenth Judicial Circuit, we take a proactive approach to juvenile crime.

80% of eligible juveniles in Polk, Highlands and Hardee County were issued an alternative to arrest in 2021.

First time juvenile offenders, who commit minor crimes, are given the opportunity to get on the right path through our Teen Court Program. The program requires acknowledgment of the wrongdoing and significant sanctions to discourage reoffending. The success rate of the program is exceptional. If those children stay out of trouble, their record is kept clean. For the children that don’t get the message, the punishments and consequences become increasingly severe. The goal of the juvenile system is to identify the issues causing the children to commit the crimes and find solutions to those problems. Of course, those juveniles who commit violent crimes or put our citizens in danger are dealt with in a much more aggressive manner. We’re so proud of our team of Juvenile Justice Prosecutors, who are dedicated to getting the offending children on the right track, while working hard to protect our community.

638
Eligible Youth

512
Issued Alternative to Arrest

126
Arrested

2017-2021

SPECIAL VICTIMS UNIT

Seeking Justice for the Most Vulnerable

The list of cases involving victims of sexual and physical abuse of some of our society's most vulnerable seems to go on and on. But each case deserves the attention of a special prosecutor to do everything possible to seek justice for the victim and protect the public. We are so fortunate to have a great group of committed prosecutors who are dedicated to that task. Our ASA's assigned to the SVU must be prepared to deal with very difficult subject matters, interact with children victims and their parents and be highly talented in the courtroom. Each case requires an incredible amount of work, but the reward is obtaining justice for those who have been through so much. Our investigators and staff assigned to our SVU are critical partners in our mission as well.



Hardee County SVU
ASA Hannah Potter



Highlands County SVU
ASA Courtney Lenhart



Bartow SVU from left to right, ASA Tim Coleman, ASA Lauren Shultz, ASA Ashley McCarthy, ASA Jessica Fisher, ASA Seth Solomon

State Attorney Traffic Diversion Program

The traffic diversion program is designed to promote public safety by requiring individuals charged with traffic offenses to obtain a valid driver's license, vehicle registration, appropriate insurance coverage, and satisfy their financial obligations. To successfully complete the program, the driver must successfully remedy whatever their traffic citation was issued for.

This program has been successful in reducing the impact on the judicial system by allowing more serious crimes to be heard. By assisting the offenders in remedying their violations, they help make our roads a safer place to drive.



Diversion Staff from left to right, Chris Labonte, Marlen Santellano, Cabrina Donaldson, Cari Daniels



LAW ENFORCEMENT RECOGNITION



PCSO STEVEN SYKES



Polk County Sheriff's Office Deputy Steven Sykes was honored for his hard work and dedication fighting to take people driving under the influence off the road. Assistant State Attorney Allison Fox recently said "Deputy Sykes has a calm demeanor and is very good at breaking down the case in a way the jury can understand. He is invested in his cases and dedicated to seeing them through, which has allowed for the successful prosecution of many DUI's."



PCSO DEBORAH RYAN

Polk County Sheriff's Office Detective Deborah Ryan was honored for her work on the Malakia Askew case. Ryan was the on-call detective when a shooting occurred that involved a fifteen year old girl in the middle of the night. Assistant State Attorney Bill Beaver said "Ryan worked tirelessly from the beginning to end of the Malakia Askew case." The defendant was convicted and sentenced to 25 years prison.





LPD JASON LEGGETT

Lakeland Police Department Detective Jason Leggett was honored for his hard work and dedication seeking justice for victims of crime. Leggett specializes in computer forensics and has assisted multiple departments in the State Attorney's Office. Assistant State Attorney Ashley McCarthy said " I am convinced that his work in a particular case secured my conviction on all 23 counts, his work is extremely complex and continuously becoming the most important evidence we can present. "



HCSO STEVEN RITENOUR

Highlands County Sheriff's Office Sergeant Steven Ritenour was honored for his continuous dedication and partnership with the State Attorney's Office specializing in the special victims unit. Ritenour goes above and beyond making sure each case is well put together and thoroughly investigated. Assistant State Attorney Courtney Lenhart says "All we have to do is pick up the phone and call Steven for any of his detectives' cases and he knows what is going on in the case and will assist me in anything that I need for that case."



PCSO KELLY WEDLEY

Polk County Sheriff's Office Sergeant Kelly Wedley was honored for her work on her countless hours investigating, interviewing and building the best cases possible to put predators who abuse children in prison. Sgt. Wedley is committed to the specialized work she does and is quick to respond to calls, emails and pretrial meetings. Assistant State Attorney Ralph Guerra said " When I get one of Sgt. Wedley's cases, I know everything needed to get a conviction is in the file."



NOTABLE CASES



Lakeland man given three life sentences for violent attempted murder



Bennett

Kaheem Bennett violently beat Derek Maude before unlocking the doors of the car he was trapped in. While Maude was running away, Bennett shot him in the back, leaving him paralyzed.

Bennett received three Life sentences for each charge: attempted first-degree murder, robbery with a firearm, and armed kidnapping. In the three years after his arrest, Lakeland's violent crimes and shootings decreased by 32 percent.

Davenport Woman Convicted and Sentenced for Trafficking in Methamphetamine



Sanford

A Polk County Jury convicted Cindy Kay Sanford of trafficking in methamphetamine of 28 grams or more and several other drug charges. Sanford was arrested by the Polk County Sheriff's Office after a significant amount of methamphetamine was found in her vehicle. Sanford has an extensive criminal record; including 39 prior convictions.

Sanford was sentenced to 15 years in Florida State Prison.

Lakeland Woman Convicted and Sentenced to Life in Prison for First Degree Murder



Wren

Breonna Wren murdered her boyfriend's six-year-old child. Wren severely beat the child back in 2018 while the child was visiting her father. The child suffered more than 37 separate injuries, including three skull fractures, a lacerated liver and external injuries from head to toe.

Wren was sentenced to Life in prison without the chance of parole.



Lake Placid Man Convicted and Sentenced to Life for Lewd Molestation



Lincoln

Robert Lincoln sexually molested a young girl for many years, beginning when the child was 12 years old. Lincoln used grooming, threats and bribes to molest the child. A Highlands County Jury convicted Lincoln of Lewd Molestation in December.

Lincoln was sentenced to Life in prison without the chance of parole.

Cold Case Murder Prosecution Leads to Four Life Sentences



Mills

During the early morning hours of September 4th, 1981, Joseph Mills broke into the bedroom window of Linda Slaton. Linda, 31, and her two young sons were sleeping in the residence. After sexually assaulting and murdering her, Mills escaped through the same window he entered. For the next four decades, The Lakeland Police worked to find Linda's killer and bring him to justice. At the same time Mills was a trusted member of the community where he coached one of Linda's son's football teams. Advances in DNA technology led to a new trial in 2019. Working with the SAO, the Lakeland Police Department was able to develop a suspect and arrested Mills. Mills pled guilty and was sentenced to four life terms in the Florida State Prison.



Zolfo Springs man gets 45 years for lewd behavior with 11-year-old



Wingo

Stephen Wingo made a child hold his cell phone for him while it played pornographic videos. Wingo would then make the child watch him as he touched himself inappropriately. Jurors convicted him of lewd and lascivious exhibition and showing pornographic material to a minor.

Wingo was sentenced to 45 years in prison.



Seven Life Sentences for Highlands County Man



Sanford

A Highlands County Jury convicted Jacob Knowles of seven counts of sexual battery. Knowles sexually abused the young girl for several months at her home and other locations.

Assistant State Attorney Courtney Lenhart obtained seven Life sentences from a Highlands County Judge.

Polk County Man Convicted of First Degree-Murder



Stansell

Elijah Stansell, was convicted by a Polk County Jury on June 17th, 2022 of first-degree murder. Stansell, along with three other co-defendants, drove to the victim's home to confront her son about an incident at school. When the victim returned home, she confronted the defendant who was driving the getaway van. As he was fleeing the area, the defendant drove his van directly towards the victim; severely injuring her. The victim subsequently died from her injuries. Stansell will be sentenced later this year to a mandatory life in prison sentence.

Winter Haven Man Convicted and Sentenced to Life for First Degree Murder



Coffer

DeAndre Coffey was convicted by a Polk County Jury of First Degree Murder. Coffey violently beat and strangled his former girlfriend in their home after becoming angry with the book she was reading to his 3 year old son. The victim died at the couple's home.

Coffey was sentenced to Life in prison.



Man Sentenced to 17 Year Prison for Attacking Roommates with Box Cutter



Handshoe

Justin Handshoe, 35, plead no contest to two counts of aggravated battery with a deadly weapon, which are second degree felonies. Handshoe attacked his roommates, a man and a woman, several days after he moved out of the apartment in May, 2018. For unknown reasons, Handshoe, entered the home, said, "Sorry, I got to do this," and cut the man's throat. When the woman jumped on Handshoe in an attempt to help the man, Handshoe stabbed her in the head before running from the home. Both victims have fully recovered from their injuries.

Handshoe was sentenced to 17 years Florida State Prison.



THE STATE ATTORNEY'S OFFICE
255 N BROADWAY AVE., 2ND FLOOR
BARTOW, FL 33831-9000

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SAO10Florida
www.sao10.com