



## MEDIA RELEASE

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### Graduating Senior Joins The Force

To get more high school students on their career paths in law enforcement on Tuesday, Nature Coast Tech graduating senior Dakota Barlow signed an offer with the Hernando County Sheriff's Office to work as a Public Service Technician (PST) cadet. Marking an expanded partnership between Hernando Schools and HCSO, the signing ceremony included Barlow's family, friends and representatives from the sheriff's office, including Sheriff Nienhuis.

"I am excited," Barlow said. "This is something I've always wanted to do. My goal has always been to become a sheriff's deputy." Barlow completed all four years of the Criminal Justice program at Nature Coast Tech and has participated with the HCSO Explorer Program for several years. The PST position will be Barlow's first step in becoming a deputy.

"This is a stepping stone toward becoming a sheriff's deputy," said Alexandra Michalicka, criminal justice teacher at Nature Coast Technical. She said that as an employee of the sheriff's office, Barlow will not only get paid, but will also receive benefits and have his law enforcement academy fees paid by HCSO.

Hernando County Sheriff Al Nienhuis said he is excited to have Barlow on board and is looking forward to swearing him in. "In law enforcement, to be really effective in the community, they have to be dedicated to the community," Sheriff Nienhuis said. "It can't be just a job. And one of the best ways to get people who are really committed to the community is to bring up people from within."

"Dakota is the first of what we hope will be many more," Michalicka said. "We are hoping each year we could have even more students hired on."

Earlier this month, Gov. Ron DeSantis approved appropriations for the school district that includes \$350,000 for an expansion of the Criminal Justice Program at Nature Coast. The funds will go toward program needs, including a P/T training area, lab space for forensic instruction, as well as the purchase of a law enforcement simulator.

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