Heat overcomes firemen at Taylor Creek Isles blaze

By Charles M. Murphy
Okeechobee News

Record setting temperatures and humidity didn't help Okeechobee firemen Tuesday as they battled a blaze at 1831 SE 33rd Street.

One firemen had to be taken to Raulerson Hospital after he was overcome by the heat while battling the blaze.

Lt. Ron Suit of Okeechobee County Fire Rescue said the blaze appeared to have started in the bedroom area and spread to the roof quickly. "We made a good stop on the fire. The guys got into the fire in the back bedroom and got it knocked down pretty quick."

Lt. Suit said heat is a problem during the day when it is hot like this, but firemen are doing a good job. He noted the injured fireman was taken to the hospital as a precaution to get checked out by a physician.

Flames showed from the roof of the bedroom and the rest of the home was full of smoke when firemen arrived around 1 p.m. Sheriff Deputies said the owner, George Canning, was not at home when the fire broke out.

Suit said several thousand dollars in damage was done. The State Fire Marshall will determine the cause of the blaze.

A neighbor or passerby rescued a family pet in the home by breaking out a door to the double wide trailer, firemen said.

Also Tuesday, a kitchen fire did approximately $7,000 in damage to a stove and kitchen of a residence at 3423 N.W. 29th Avenue in Basswood.

The fire report from paramedic Zack Smith said some grease on the stove caught fire at about 4 p.m.

Smoke was showing from the eves and the front door of the home when crews arrived. Four units and eight firemen were on the scene for approximately an hour.

The resident, Noelia Valdez, was not injured.

The American Red Cross came to the assistance of firemen and the residents in both of these incidents on Tuesday.

Okeechobee News/**Charles Murphy**

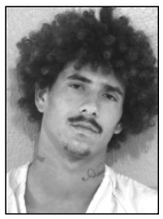
Lt. Ron Suit (center) and firefighter Joseph Sullivan talk with State Fire Marshall Greg Gilkey after Tuesday's fire in Taylor Creek Isles.

Gang member given 7-year prison stint

By Eric Kopp
Okeechobee News

A reputed gang member was sentenced to seven years in prison by Circuit Court Judge Lawrence Mirman after he was found guilty of a number of different felonies.

Fernando Rolon Rivera, 21, N.W. Sixth St., Okeechobee, was also ordered to serve a year in the Okeechobee County Jail and pay $650 in restitution. All of his sentences are to run concurrently.



Fernando R. Rivera

Besides those charges, Rivera was also found guilty of violating his probation following his 2008 arrest on a charge of possession of oxycodone. On July 2, 2008, he was placed on 18 months probation. But, Judge Mirman terminated Rivera's probation Monday and sentenced him to five years in prison.

On Oct. 5 Rivera was found guilty of high speed and wanton fleeing, burglary of an unoccupied conveyance and grand theft—all felonies. He was also found guilty of criminal mischief and resisting arrest without violence, which are both misdemeanors.

He was sentenced to serve five years each on the burglary and grand theft charges, and seven years on the felony fleeing charge. He was sentenced to a year in the county jail on each misdemeanor charge.

Rivera will receive credit for the 450 days he has already served. On the VOP conviction, Rivera will receive 452 days credit for time served.

Rivera was arrested for stealing a radio, amplifier and speakers from a Ford Expedition that was sitting in the parking lot of El Amigo Todos in downtown Okeechobee. He then led police and deputies on a high speed chase during which he ran a stoplight at U.S. 98 and S.R. 70 W.

He then tried to elude law enforcement by jumping from the Ford Crown Victoria he was driving and running into a wooded area in DeBerry Gardens.

Rivera was arrested a short time later at his home by Deputy Sergeant Shannon Peterson of the Okeechobee County Sheriff's Office (OCSO).

Defense attorney Stanley Glenn, from the Public Defender's Office, told the judge that Rivera was "contrite and remorseful" for what he had done. Mr. Glenn also stated that while in jail Rivera took his GED test and will soon know if he passed.

Mr. Glenn then stated that a prison term of two to three years would be appropriate.

But Assistant State Attorney Bernard Romero had different ideas and told Judge Mirman that Rivera was looking at a maximum prison stint of 20 years.

"He said he now sees the light," said Mr. Romero of the defendant, "when he's actually feeling the heat."

Before the judge handed down his sentencing order he heard from OCSO Detective Sergeant Brad Stark, who testified that Rivera is a documented member of the Varrio Boys, a local gang. Rivera was also actively involved in a 2007 gang tagging incident inside the city limits, said the detective.

Sgt. Stark, who heads up the OCSO street crimes unit and has been documenting local criminal street gangs since 1995, told the judge that the Varrio Boys have been prominent in Okeechobee County since 1992. Locally, he added, that group has merged with the Gangster Satan Disciples and the Surenos gangs.

Judge Mirman ruled that upon his release from prison, Rivera will not be required to serve time on probation. However, he will have his driver's license suspended for two years.

In other sentencings Monday:

• Alecia Gilman was found guilty in two separate cases in which she was charged with burglary of a dwelling, grand theft, burglary of a dwelling and grand theft of a firearm. She was sentenced to 18 months in prison as a youthful offender. She will receive credit for two days served in the county jail. Judge Mirman ordered that she must also testify truthfully against a co-defendant. She was ordered to serve four years on probation on each burglary count and 42 months probation on each grand theft charge. Those probation periods will run concurrently. Gilman will also have to pay $571.93 in restitution as well as court costs and fees of $595 on each case, which total $2,380.

• Jerrid Douglas received a sentence of 60 days in the county jail after he was found guilty of grand theft. He will also serve two years on probation. Douglas received credit for the 23 days he had already served. Judge Mirman ruled that Douglas must pay $323 in restitution, as well as $1,651 in court costs and fees.