

Sheriff's Office concludes Operation Guardian Angel arresting 23 for soliciting minors for sexual activity

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Sheriff Ken Mascara announced that a month-long investigation to catch child predators has ended with 23 arrests. The operation was a joint partnership with the South Florida Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force.

"These individuals were all residents of St. Lucie County and were all actively communicating with individuals whom they thought were children, luring them into sexual activity," said Sheriff Ken J. Mascara. "In every instance, undercover deputies, posing as minors, repeatedly made it clear they were under age and each time the offender continued to pursue them."

According to the Sheriff, detectives used websites and social media platforms to communicate with the offenders.

"Some offenders even lied about their age to make themselves sound younger," Mascara said. "In one instance, an offender even brought drugs with them saying it would keep the child 'mello' during the interaction."

According to the Sheriff, the 23 individuals were charged with felonies that include lewd and lascivious behavior on a victim 12 to 16 years old, use of a computer to seduce, solicit or lure a child, use of a two-way communication device to facilitate a felony, traveling to meet after using a computer to lure a child and misrepresentation of age to solicit, lure or seduce. All were booked into the St. Lucie County Jail and held on bond.

"I have long stated that the two most vulnerable populations in our community are children and the elderly," Mascara said. "These monsters preyed upon children, knew they were children and carried out their intention to violate their innocence. They will now face the consequence of their actions for the rest of their lives."

ABOUT THE SHERIFF:

The Florida Constitution establishes the Office of the elected County Sheriff who is responsible for preserving the peace, carrying out the orders of Florida courts and the Board of County Commissioners, and providing deputies at court sessions and meetings of the Board of County Commissioners. The Sheriff is the chief correctional officer of the county. Sheriff Ken J. Mascara is elected by the people of St. Lucie County and is accountable to them.

