

In response to a request from the media and many concerns from community members regarding the Samantha Sperry missing person's case, the Graves County Sheriff's Office has prepared the following statement.

The Sheriff's Office received a complaint of Rhen Hendrickson disappearing into the woods off Dooks Chapel Road on March 28, 2018. When our deputies responded, they learned that Hendrickson had contacted his mother via FaceTime and stated that he had taken several pills and was going into the woods to die. The Sheriff's Office has had past interactions with Hendrickson when he was violent and armed. Hendrickson is well known to law enforcement and is considered an officer safety risk. As Emergency Management Director, Chief Deputy Davant Ramage, made the decision that night not to go into the woods to look for Hendrickson, due to officer safety and the safety of other individuals who would be assisting in a search. We would have had to ask volunteer fire departments to come help look for Hendrickson as well. Again, knowing he has a violent past, we couldn't put unarmed civilians in the woods at night. At this point, Samantha had not yet been reported missing. It was not until Thursday, March 29, 2018, that Mr. and Mrs. Artis reported her missing.

On the night of March 29, 2018, Samantha's abandoned car was impounded. It was searched by one of our deputies. At that same time, two deputies traveled to Paducah. They interviewed an individual to verify information that we had been given about the whereabouts of Dusty Holder during the time frame of the previous days. Another person was being interviewed in Graves County about Samantha's disappearance.

On March 30, 2018, the first search was done for Samantha. It was done by the Graves County Sheriff's Office. On that date, Dusty Holder met with Detective Steve Halsell, Deputy Brooke Nelms, Deputy Richard Edwards and Chief Deputy Ramage. They went to the Kaler Bottoms area where Samantha was allegedly last seen by Holder. Holder said that he and Samantha had ridden a four-wheeler into the woods, gotten stuck and stayed there the rest of the night. According to him, they left on foot the next morning.

Chief Ramage asked an unnamed individual to conduct a search independent of Sheriff's Office. This individual has extensive knowledge of the area due to him being raised nearby and hunting there throughout his life. Chief Ramage had explained to him what deputies were looking for. While the deputies and Holder were searching for the four-wheeler Holder said had been left in the woods, the other unnamed party located said four-wheeler. He came back and reported this to the deputies. He also reported that there was only one set of footprints around the four-wheeler and one set of footprints coming out of the woods. This information was not revealed to Holder.

The important facts that were learned here are as follows:

- Holder's story did not match up with the physical evidence at the scene or in the surrounding area.
- There was absolutely no proof that Samantha was ever there or in that area.
- There was evidence of a small fire. In that fire we located two cell phones identified as belonging to Dusty Holder. They were collected and are being analyzed.

Once Holder's four-wheeler was recovered, all parties left the woods. Holder was allowed to leave and agreed to meet detectives at the Sheriff's Office later for an interview.

When Hendrickson went missing, it was not known to the Sheriff's Office that Samantha was missing. However, when Samantha's missing person's report was taken, an investigation began immediately. Persons of interest were being developed and questioned. Evidence was being collected. In under 24 hours of the report being taken, deputies and one private citizen were in the woods searching for Samantha. Several different individuals were being interviewed on that Friday afternoon. We were able to find someone who was of solid character who had seen Samantha recently. From his account, we were able to put Samantha in Graves County early Tuesday morning, but not in the same area where we were told she went missing. At this point, the last place she was seen by a credible source was in a car, and a day earlier than when Holder stated he and she were in the woods for the night. To this day, there has been no physical evidence to suggest Holder's statement was true or that Samantha was ever in those woods that night.

Deputies interviewed Dusty Holder at the Sheriff's Office on the night of March 30, 2018. Holder gave the story that he and Samantha had entered the woods on the four wheeler, became stuck, stayed the night and walked out the next morning (note the above-mentioned physical evidence at the site indicated that only one person's footprints were in the vicinity). Holder stated that Samantha headed south on State Route 131 and he headed north. According to Holder, this was the last time he saw Samantha. During this interview, deputies from the Sheriff's Office applied for, and obtained a search warrant for Samantha's home in Murray. Accompanied by deputies from Calloway County, the warrant was executed. Several items were seized to be sent to the Kentucky State Police Lab for analysis. These activities lasted until the early morning hours of Saturday, March 31, 2018.

The Kentucky Revised Statute 39F.180, states that a search *may* be (not *shall* be) conducted as soon as a missing person is reported. It states that there is nothing that prevents a search from being done immediately. In this particular instance, there was no statute requiring a search be done; however, the Graves County Sheriff's Office completed a search and conducted interviews in an attempt to locate Samantha.

To our knowledge, on Saturday, March 31, 2018, there was no searching done. Then on April 1, 2018, a group of people went out and entered the woods and searched. On Sunday night, April 1, 2018, Hendrickson came out of the woods and acknowledged having been there for five days. He was taken to the hospital that night and brought to the Sheriff's Office on Monday for questioning. Hendrickson gave his account of the events surrounding Samantha's disappearance, as well as his own disappearance. It was in that interview that we learned that Hendrickson himself had taken items of Samantha's and his own into the woods and lost them. As far as we can prove, these items were taken into the woods by Hendrickson. There is no evidence to dispute this. If these items, in fact, existed, they would be valuable evidence for our case. Deputies asked a search party to look for these items, and they were found.

Jeremy Blansett, who is the Area 1 Emergency Management Coordinator for Kentucky, asked Chief Ramage if the Sheriff's Office wanted him to step in to coordinate and

oversee the ground search activities. This was a welcomed request as it allowed Sheriff's Office investigators to follow up on other leads and possible sightings, as there were many. We did, however, have a deputy at every search of which we were made aware. The Graves County Sheriff's Office is a small department, and at the same time these searches were going on, there were also calls for service throughout the county. Deputies were needed to answer these calls and provide services to its citizens.

Chief Ramage continued to speak to Tina Artis, keeping her up to date on a regular basis. For some time, they spoke every Thursday around 10 am. That was the arrangement that was made between the two of them. There were times she gave information for us to follow up on, and we did. As a matter of fact, Chief Ramage has spoken to her within the last two weeks, updating her and answering questions.

During this investigation, we were contacted by the FBI, who offered their assistance. The FBI reviewed the case. They stated that it appeared we were doing everything they would do and that if we needed help to call them. They could find no fault with our actions. We have been working with the Kentucky State Police as well. They have reviewed the file in its entirety and arrived at the same conclusion as the FBI.

Recently, through combined efforts, we have been able to generate another lead. We were able to track down some possible evidence in another county. It has been collected and sent to the Kentucky State Police Lab. Over the past seven months, we have not quit looking for and following up on any lead, no matter how small it may have been. There are numerous other search warrants that have been executed during this time that we cannot presently elaborate on.

To sum up, the search for Samantha Sperry continues. The Graves County Sheriff's Office performed the first search two days before anyone else searched. We have collected many, many pieces of evidence and sent items that can be analyzed to the lab for examination. As of now, we have sent a total of 39 pieces of evidence to the lab. From our initial search we were able to develop other possible leads and persons of interest. We followed up with those and all that have developed since. We sympathize with how difficult this situation must be for the family, and we will continue to work to resolve the disappearance of Samantha Sperry.