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BREAKING NEWS NEWS

Osceola commissioner impersonated deputy at HOA meeting, FDLE says

By KATIE RICE and DAVID HARRIS
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FEEDBACK



Commissioner Fred Hawkins Jr. -- The Silver Spurs Rodeo Parade through downtown St. Cloud, on Friday, February 21,

2020. (Ricardo Ramirez Buxeda/ Orlando Sentinel) (Ricardo Ramirez Buxeda/Orlando Sentinel)

Osceola County Commissioner Fred Hawkins Jr. was arrested Monday evening for impersonating a member of the Sheriff's Office during a homeowners association election last year, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement said.

The Turnberry Reserve Homeowners Association on Nov. 7 rented the library at East Lake Elementary School for a board election and hired a security guard to ensure only homeowners could enter, an affidavit said. FDLE spokeswoman Gretl Plessinger said Hawkins, who represents Osceola's District 5, tried to enter the library despite not belonging to the association.

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When the guard tried to stop him, Hawkins showed Sheriff's Office credentials, and threatened to arrest the security guard. The incident was captured by security guard Ailyn De Pena's body-worn camera.

"I am with the Sheriff's Office," Hawkins told De Pena. "You're about to get arrested."

Hawkins then forced his way inside the room, the affidavit said. But it was De Pena who was arrested that day, after Hawkins accused her of pushing him out of a doorway. De Pena faced charges of battery and resisting arrest charge but the case against her was later dropped, court records show.

In a statement Monday night, Hawkins' campaign said he "was merely trying to gain access inside a meeting room where an HOA meeting was growing contentious and citizens getting unruly."

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"Hawkins was attempting to reach a deputy in hopes of deescalating the situation when he was blocked by a private security guard," spokeswoman Christina Johnson

said. "... Commissioner Hawkins has routinely cooperated with investigators in an open and honest fashion and will continue to do so."

Hawkins, 53, holds the honorary title of special deputy with the Osceola County Sheriff's Office, but is not a certified law enforcement officer and does not have arrest powers, Plessinger said.

FDLE issued a warrant for Hawkins' arrest Monday, and Hawkins turned himself in at the Osceola County Jail in the evening after **attending a Board of County Commissioners meeting**. Jail records showed Hawkins was booked into the jail on \$1,000 bond and bonded out shortly afterward.

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The Orange-Osceola State Attorney's Office will prosecute Hawkins' case.

De Pena filed a lawsuit against Hawkins and others, alleging false arrest, malicious prosecution and battery. Hawkins has denied the allegations.

He is currently serving his third term as commissioner and is running to represent District 42 in the Florida House of Representatives.

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