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Mental-health counselor accused of extortion

Willoughby Mariano | Sentinel Staff Writer
February 17, 2009

POLK COUNTY - Polk County deputies were searching for possible additional victims after arresting a mental-health counselor on a charge that he tried to extort money from his client.

Paul Sandman, 51, of Winter Haven demanded \$2,500 and two years' rent on a storage unit in exchange for a letter certifying that a client completed four years of therapy, investigators said. Client Marshall Books, 40, needed the certification to gain release from probation on sex charges and see his children without supervision, an arrest report states. Sandman told Books during a counseling session that he was having financial problems and needed the cash to move to Tennessee, authorities said. He needed the storage space to stow patient records.

Sandman previously was arrested for marijuana possession and other charges. He temporarily lost his standing as a provider of services from the state Department of Corrections. Sandman was booked Monday into the Polk County Jail on one second-degree felony count of extortion.

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