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## **Shooting victim was mentally ill**

On 10/6/04 A Mentally Ill, Armed Male Subject was shot and killed by a Sarasota Police Officer after he lunged at a Sarasota PD Lieutenant that had arrived on scene of "man with a knife" call:

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SARASOTA -- Five months before police shot and killed Thomas Levanos, he was living at a treatment center the state operates for people with major mental illnesses.

Based on a recommendation from the Department of Children & Families, a judge allowed Levanos to leave the Gainesville facility in May and participate in a residential treatment program in Sarasota, two blocks south of downtown on Morrill Street.

Residents are monitored by mental health professionals and are prohibited from having alcohol or weapons.

Yet Levanos, 50, was wielding a knife Tuesday when a police officer shot and killed him, just a short walk from the apartment complex where he lived with other mentally ill residents.

Relatives and criminal justice professionals say the Levanos case is indicative of a major problem: where to house the area's mentally ill, especially since the closing of G. Pierce Wood Memorial Hospital in Arcadia two years ago.

"I would take this as an example of the danger of not maintaining a facility like G. Pierce Wood," said Circuit Judge Lee Haworth, who had ordered Levanos to be committed to the Gainesville treatment center. "Before, people like Levanos would have been kept and monitored. We no longer have that option."

Levanos, who was once married and has a daughter, appeared before Haworth in 2001, when he was accused of setting his house on fire.

Deputies said in an arrest report at the time that Levanos emerged with a kitchen knife and was cutting his wrists, stomach and neck. It took 20 minutes to get him to drop the knife.

Levanos was charged with arson. Haworth found him not guilty by reason of insanity and committed him to the Gainesville treatment center, where he stayed for more than two years.

At a hearing in May, Senior Judge Thomas Gallen followed a DCF recommendation and released Levanos to the residential program on Morrill Street.

He was ordered to undergo mental health treatment from a forensic specialist and case manager from Coastal Behavioral Healthcare Inc., a group paid by the state to look after the mentally ill.

Gallen could not be reached Wednesday, and Christine Cauffield, executive director of Coastal Behavioral Healthcare, did not return a reporter's phone calls.

Police said they spotted Levanos running with a knife at Links Avenue and Ringling Boulevard just before 2 p.m. Tuesday. His arms and chest were covered with blood, they said. Levanos raised the knife and ran toward the officers, who repeatedly yelled for him to drop the knife, witnesses said. When he wouldn't stop, Officer Bud Johnson shot him.

Relatives said Wednesday that Levanos had not been the same since he suffered an aneurysm and underwent brain surgery shortly before he burned the house in 2001.

His mother-in-law, who did not want her name printed in the newspaper, said Levanos often walked around the neighborhood with a knife when she lived with him and her daughter in the house he was accused of burning down.

She said he often acted up when he didn't take his medication and should not have been let out of the Gainesville treatment center.

Haworth said the shooting should educate the public about the need for more resources to care for the mentally ill.

"I think it's a community concern," he said. "Anybody walking on the street needs to know there are people out there who are monitored and have serious mental problems. There's really no choice except to put them in a supervisory program and hope that it works."

The police are conducting an internal affairs investigation into the shooting, a standard procedure. Johnson is on paid administrative leave until the end of the week.

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