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County woman facing sex-with-minors charge



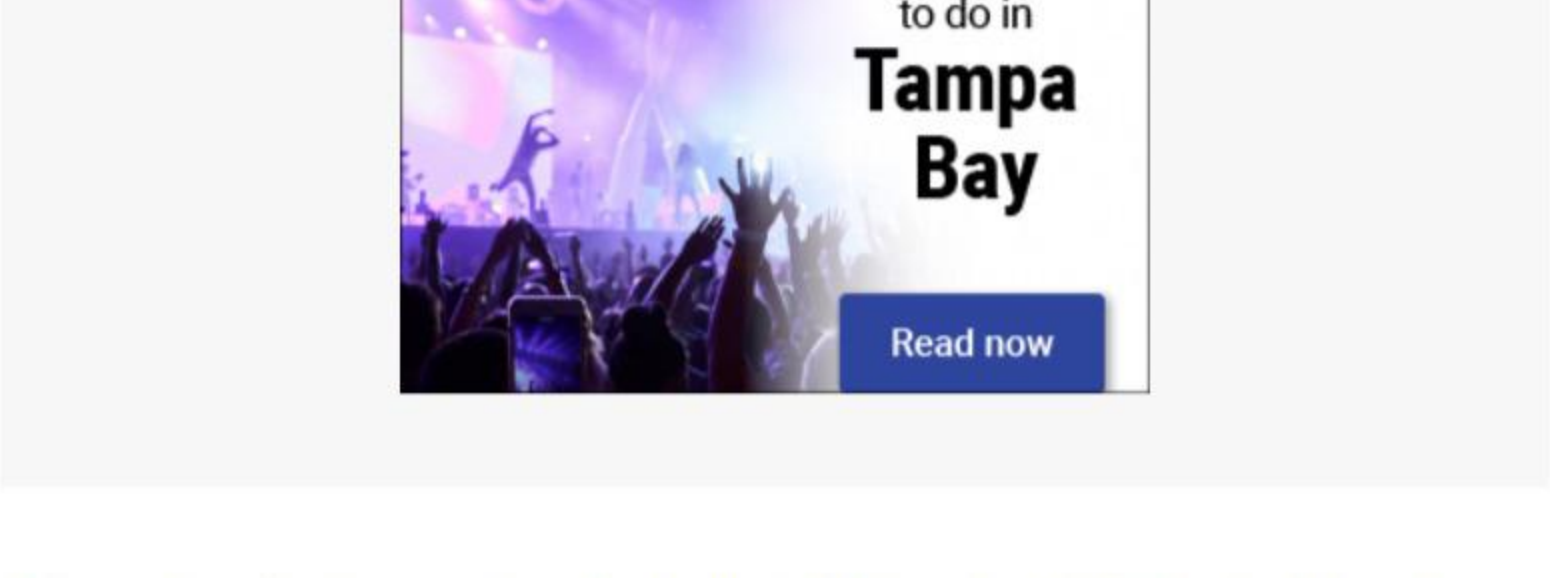
By **DUANE BOURNE**

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A 31-year-old Pasco County woman was arrested on Wednesday after she was accused of having sexual intercourse with two teenage boys while she worked as a cook in a juvenile residential facility.

Synnica Canty, who also worked in food service at Lacoochee Elementary School, was charged with two counts of unlawful sexual activity with a minor, a second-degree felony. She was released from the Central Pasco Detention Center at 3:50 a.m. Thursday after posting \$10,000 bail, officials said.

Canty of Lacoochee was fired from her job at the Withlacoochee Juvenile Residential Facility in southeastern Hernando County on Nov. 8, one day after she was accused of having sex with a juvenile offender in a storage closet, Department of Juvenile Justice spokesman Tom Denham said.



After an investigation was launched, officials determined that Canty allowed minors at the facility to use her cellular phone, a violation of department policy.

"She was not fired as a result of sexual misconduct allegations," Denham said Thursday. "We have not finished that investigation. We don't tolerate any kind of sexual contact by any adult with a juvenile or between juveniles."

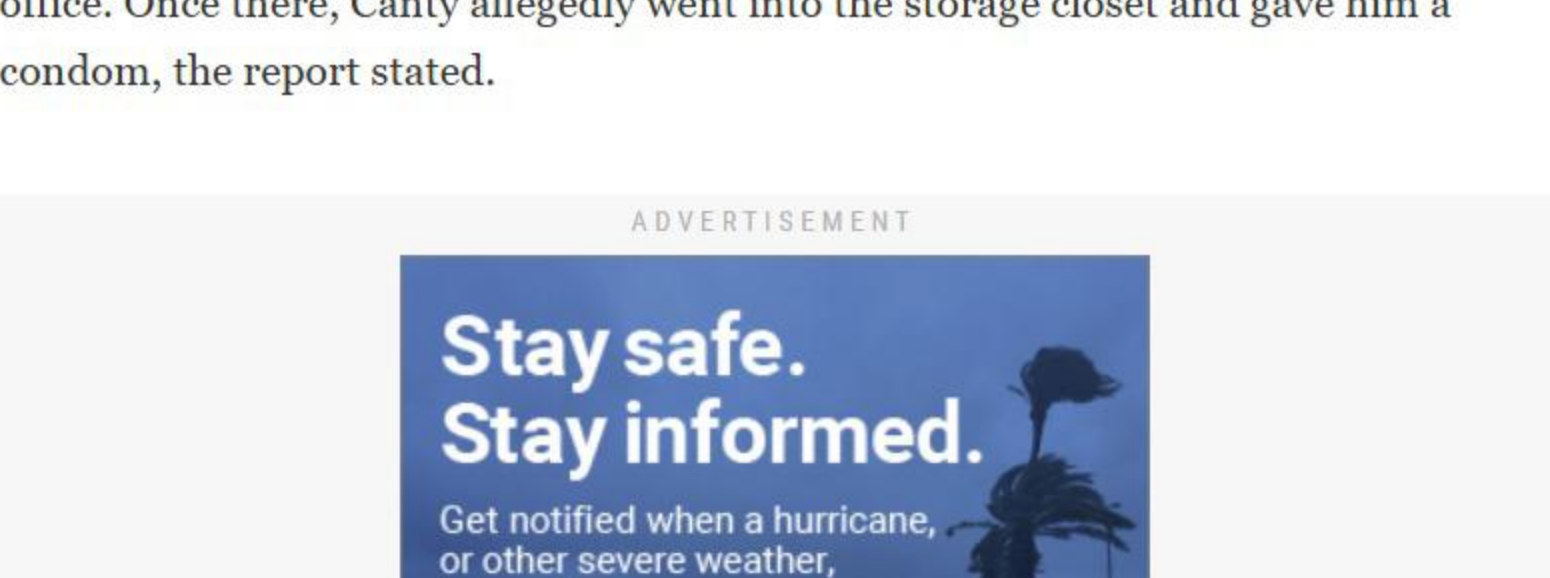
While the investigation is pending, it is not likely that Canty would face further disciplinary action because she has already been terminated.

The Hernando County Sheriff's Office began looking into the allegations on Nov. 10 after juvenile justice officials notified the agency of the alleged offenses, sheriff's spokeswoman Deputy Donna Black said.

Investigators soon learned that the juveniles, who were 16 and 17 at the time the incidents are alleged, performed duties as helpers in the kitchen area.

According to a sheriff's report, the first incident occurred sometime between July and October 2004 when the older teen, who is now 18, is alleged to have had sex with Canty in a storage closet.

During the more recent incident, which officials said occurred on Nov. 7, the second teen was working in the kitchen when Canty asked him to come into the office. Once there, Canty allegedly went into the storage closet and gave him a condom, the report stated.



A witness told a sheriff's investigator he was in the vicinity during the alleged sexual encounter and the teen, who was not identified, told him he had just had sex with Canty. For proof, the boy reached into his pants and retrieved a condom Canty had given him, the report said.

Operated by a private company, Career Systems Development Corp., the work camp is situated deep within the Withlacoochee State Forest and is home to 20 teens, ages 14 to 18, who participate in the juvenile offender program.

When authorities confronted Canty on the allegations at her home in Lacoochee, she asked for her lawyer. Canty, who does not have a criminal history in Florida, was taken into custody on the Hernando County warrant on Wednesday.

On Thursday, Pasco County school officials could not be reached for comment on the status of Canty's employment with the district.

In 1998, Canty's 2-year-old son, Willie Hills Jr., was shot and killed when his 3-year-old friend found a loaded .22-caliber revolver in Canty's apartment and playfully aimed it at the toddler.

The Pasco Sheriff's Office ruled the shooting an accident.

Staff writer Jamal Thalji contributed to this report.

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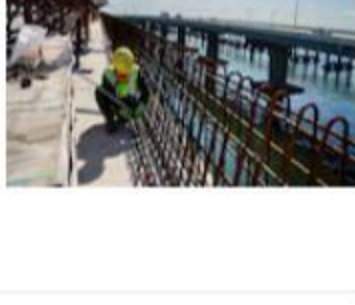
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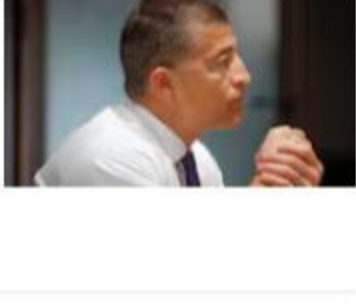
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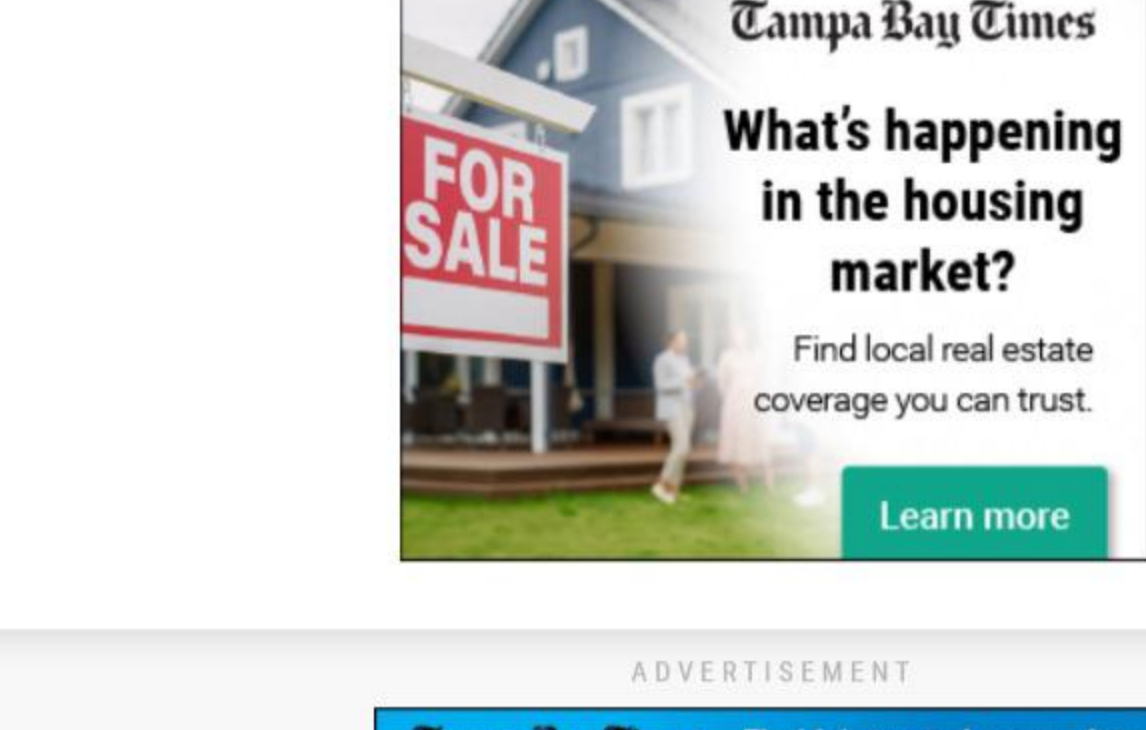
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