



Rick Staly, Sheriff  
FLAGLER COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE



RJ Larizza, 7<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit  
OFFICE OF THE STATE ATTORNEY

## JOINT NEWS RELEASE

Date: August 26, 2020

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### First In-Person Criminal Jury Trial Since COVID-19 Court Shut-down Results in Guilty Verdict on all Charges Sheriff Staly Testifies on his Role in the Arrest

19-00663-CFFA – State of Florida v. Brian Keith Johnson

DOB: 01/28/1998

Grand Theft Auto

Fleeing and Eluding – High Speed and Reckless

**BUNNELL** – State Attorney R.J. Larizza and Flagler County Sheriff Rick Staly were both on hand on Tuesday, August 25, 2020, for the first in-person criminal jury trial in the State of Florida since the COVID-19 pandemic began. 22-year-old Brian Keith Johnson was convicted following a two-day jury trial on felony charges of fleeing and eluding a law enforcement officer and grand theft auto. Johnson faces a maximum possible penalty of 20 years in a state prison facility at a sentencing hearing set for October 2, 2020 on these charges. A Flagler County Jury comprised of 4 men and 2 women deliberated for approximately two hours before returning the guilty verdicts.

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The historic trial marked the first time an in-person criminal jury proceeding commenced since the start of COVID-19 in Florida following the safety protocols put in place by the Seventh Circuit criminal justice stakeholders.

“This trial was a joint effort of the State Attorney’s Office, the Judiciary, The Flagler County Sheriff’s Office, the Flagler Clerk’s Office and the Public Defender’s office. This represents a milestone in our efforts to resume normal courtroom operations. The State Attorney’s Office, partnered with the FCSO will continue to put public safety first as we work through the challenges presented by COVID-19.” State Attorney R.J. Larizza said from the courtroom following the reading of the verdict.

The trial was also notable for the fact that Flagler County Sheriff Rick Staly testified as one of the State’s key witnesses. Sheriff Staly was the first law enforcement officer to locate the stolen vehicle following a hit by a license plate reader. [The original FCSO news release on this case can be viewed here.](#)

“I am glad that we were able to get this case tried by a jury of his peers even in the midst of a global pandemic so justice can be served,” Sheriff Rick Staly said following the trial. “He put countless lives in danger on that day over a year ago by his very dangerous driving of a stolen car and it is time for him to face the penalty. I appreciate the partnership with the State Attorney, the Clerk’s Office and the Public Defender’s Office for making this trial happen.”

Assistant State Attorney Phil Bavington prosecuted the case. Circuit Judge Terence R. Perkins presided over the case and will pronounce sentence On October 2, 2020. Johnson, who is already on probation for a felony charge of dealing in stolen property out of Alachua County, will also potentially face additional sanctions for his violation of probation. Judge Perkins, who was given statewide jurisdiction by the Florida Supreme Court in response to COVID-19, is expected to sentence on the Alachua County cases at that time.

Body camera footage from the arrest on July 14, 2019 is available here: <https://youtu.be/vycTPH0ud88>

Also see the coverage from the Florida Bar: <https://www.floridabar.org/the-florida-bar-news/flagler-county-hosts-criminal-jury-trial-canady-notes-safe-practices-in-place-for-expanded-court-proceedings/>

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