

Lake Wales officer accused of sex with minor

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2015 cop pedophile

, *Jacqueline Ingles*

A Lake Wales police sergeant was arrested Tuesday and charged with having a sexual relationship with a 17-year-old girl.

Aaron Woodford Barnes, 37, denied the allegations after he was arrested while on duty, according to the Lake Wales Police Department.

He is charged with contributing to the delinquency of a minor and four counts of sexual activity with a minor.

"This wasn't a mistake," said Lake Wales Police Chief Chris Velasquez. "People do make mistakes. This was a choice. This was a decision."

The investigation into Barnes began Tuesday after Lake Wales Police Department received a complaint from a substitute teacher that Barnes was possibly involved in the relationship.

The Polk County Sheriff's Office was contacted to investigate. According to Lake Wales Police Department, sheriff's detectives learned that Barnes met the girl a year ago when she was 16. In May 2014, police said, the relationship turned sexual at Barnes' home.

It reportedly began when Barnes asked the teen to babysit his son.

The department said they had three more sexual encounters in the next seven months, and the girl told investigators he let her drink wine on one occasion.

"She said she did so willingly but let me be clear. There is no consent between a 16-year-old and a 17-year-old and a 37-year-old," Velasquez explained.

Barnes was arrested while working Tuesday night.

Although he denied the allegations, police said, he acknowledged exchanging inappropriate texts with the girl.

He has been put on paid leave until criminal and administrative investigations related to the case are completed.

The department hired Barnes in May 2009. He was promoted to sergeant in December and received an annual \$50,252.29 salary.

Police Chief Chris Velasquez gave the following statement in a news release Wednesday night:

"I am extremely disappointed with the conduct of Aaron Barnes in this case. A child under the age of 18 cannot consent to any sexual activity with an adult of his age. I am thankful this was brought to our attention in order for us to address and take swift action. We hold our officers to the highest of standards and have an obligation to protect and serve whether we are on or off duty. We do not tolerate crime in Lake Wales and we certainly will not tolerate it within our department. I assure you this incident is not representative of the men and women that work hard every day serving this community. We will continue to do our utmost to adhere to our core values of accountability, quality service, and professionalism while serving our residents."