

Press Release

LAKE CITY
POLICE
DEPARTMENT



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Chief of Police Gerald Butler

For Immediate Release

December 18, 2025

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Joint Rescue Operation Saves 12 Year Old From Roof

On Wednesday, December 17, at approximately 9:30 p.m., the Lake City Police Department responded to a missing child call at PetSmart. Officers made contact on scene with the mother of a 12-year-old autistic child who had wandered away inside the store. The mother believed her daughter was looking at the cats available for adoption but could not locate her. As officers responded, the mother began searching as well and was told by another customer that a young girl had been seen walking toward the back of the store. When officers arrived, the mother advised that her daughter was autistic and, based on past behavior, believed she may have been looking for a stray cat to pet.

As officers began searching the area, an officer spotted the girl on the roof of the building. Attempts to call her down were unsuccessful. When one officer climbed to the roof, the child became frightened, ran to the opposite side of the building, and sat on the edge of the roof.

Lake City Fire Department and Columbia EMS responded and staged on scene. After consulting with the mother, responders initiated a rescue attempt in which the mother and a firefighter were taken to the roof using the Fire Department's tower truck. This attempt was unsuccessful, however, as the child ran to the back side of the building and began attempting to slide down a gutter pipe.

Responders rushed to the back of the building and were able to place a ladder beneath her, which supported her and prevented a fall. The child refused to come down and instead climbed back up toward the roof. By that point, two LCPD officers and an LCFD firefighter were positioned above her and were able to grab her as soon as she came within reach. She was then safely transferred to the LCFD tower truck and lowered to the ground with her mother.

"Thanks to the keen observation of our patrol officers who spotted her on the roof, we were able to initiate a swift and coordinated response between Police, Fire, and EMS," said Lake City Police Chief Gerald Butler. "We are grateful to have access to specialty rescue equipment in Lake City, such as LCFD's tower truck, which ultimately helped save this girl's life."

Beyond the rescue operation, an investigation continues into the circumstances of the incident, including how the child was able to leave the store unnoticed, how she gained access to the roof, and what resources are available to help the family ensure this does not happen again.



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Photo courtesy of the Lake City Fire Department



Report information anonymously by calling the LCPD TIPS line at 386-719-2068
or Crime Stoppers of Columbia County at 386-754-7099.

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