Bandits use forklift to steal ATM

BY EBRA PESANTES
Sun Sentinel

MIRAMAR — You have to have the right tools for the job. And for the thieves who ymined an ATM from its footing, that tool was a "meg" forklift.

After stealing the forklift from a construction site, two or more bandits used it at a nearby Bank of America in Miramar to pick up the ATM and place it in the back of a stolen box truck.

The heist unfolded within minutes Friday, between about 12:56 a.m. and 1:11 a.m. The bank soon alerted authorities, but the thieves were gone when police arrived. "You don’t see it every day," Miramar Police Officer Gil Bueno said. "I would imagine it's not a very easy crime to pull off."

What appeared to be the top portion of the ATM, with the bank logo on it, was left crumpled at the bank at 15999 SW 298th Street.

The forklift was found abandoned near the bank, where the thieves apparently rammed it into the side of the building during the heist. The crash left a hole in the structure. "Collateral damage," Bueno said.

The box truck had been swiped in Hialeah Gardens, but had not yet been reported stolen, authorities said. Hours later, the vehicle was recovered in Opa-locka along with the damaged ATM machine, Bueno said.

The thieves got to the cash, but authorities are not disclosing how much was stolen. The FBI is also investigating the brazen heist.

At the same bank branch June 26, 2008, thieves yanked an ATM from the drive-through lanes using a forklift that was also stolen. A dump truck was used to haul it away, but a flat tire thwarted thieves’ plans, Bueno said.

The abandoned truck and ATM were recovered in that case, but no money was taken and no arrests were made, he said.

It’s unknown whether the two cases are related; police say there has been no indication they are.

Although Bueno called Friday’s theft more, enterprising criminals have looked to ATMs as a quick way to get cash. "THe illegal way. ATM thefts and burglaries do happen from time to time," FBI spokesman Jim Marshall said. "They don’t seem to be as frequent as bank robberies, but we have to be on the watch for them as well."

On Friday, the bank’s surveillance cameras captured the incident, and authorities released still images that showed at least one suspect wearing jeans and a long-sleeved black shirt riding the green forklift with a white handkerchief covering his face.

Authorities urge anyone with information about the identity of the thieves to call the FBI at 305-944-9855.

Ode to rescue brothers

By Douglas Banks

The wrongful death suit against Fontainebleau owner Jeffrey Soffer is back on, with plaintiff’s lawyers heading to state court to accuse him of covering up his role in a 2002 fatal helicopter crash in the Bahamas.

Soffer first faced the allegations in a federal lawsuit that was filed Dec. 9 but then withdrawn without explanation about three weeks later. In the suit, plaintiff Daria Gogoleva accused Soffer of illegally taking the controls of a helicopter carrying her husband, wealthy tax attorney Lance Valdez.

A Gogoleva lawyer said the lawsuit was filed in Miami-Dade Circuit Court on Friday. Soffer’s lawyer, Bob Martinez, said...

Local & State

Around Florida

North Miami-Dade

Veteran firefighter is killed in crash

A Miami-Dade firefighter, who worked for nearly two decades, died late Thursday night after colliding with a truck near the Palmetto Expressway.

The accident happened at Northwest 27th Avenue and 65th Street.

North English, 44, of Pembroke Pines, was riding a motorcycle heading north on Northwest 27th Avenue when he collided with the back of a truck as it was attempting to turn onto Northwest 65th Street, according to Florida Highway Patrol spokesman Jose Sanchez.

English was taken to Jack-son Memorial Hospital, where he was pronounced dead shortly after the accident.

FHPI said the accident remained under investigation.

MIAMI-DADE FIRE CHIEF Dave Downey posted a photo and message on his Facebook wall Friday morning remembering English and offering condolences.

"He served this department and the citizens of Miami-Dade County with pride and distinction for over 20 years," the post read. "On behalf of the Miami-Dade Fire Rescue Family, I extend our thoughts, prayers and condolences to Firefighter Steven English and his family. He will be missed." LANCE DIXON

Sanford

Judge: Blind man acted in self-defense

A judge on Friday cut short the weeklong murder trial of a blind man, granting his "stand your ground" motion and ruling that he acted in self-defense.

John Wayne Rogers, 40, killed his friend, James T. DeWitt, 34, in Rogers' Geneva home March 27, 2002, after a long drinking session.

Rogers is a blind man who was defending himself from an attack in his home, said Assistant Public Defender Tim Casdall and Stuart Brinson.

Rogers shot DeWitt once in the chest with a .308 Remington assault rifle from a distance of about 14 inches, defense attorneys said.

DeWitt and his girlfriend had gone to Rogers' house to drink beer and had spent the night. The next day the group had made a 10 a.m. trip to the store to buy more beer, according to Rogers' arrest report.

The defendant testified that he had asked DeWitt to leave but that the victim had attacked him, so he went into another room and retrieved his rifle. After Rogers pointed it in DeWitt's general direction, he said DeWitt charged him.

"He felt like he had no choice but to shoot him, and he did," said Casdall.

Litigation

Soffer target of new lawsuit

By Douglas Banks

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