

Armed Robbery – With a Twist

I'm a sucker for interesting news stories, and the following caught my eye. An armed robber attempted to knock off a store but was chased down the street by some flying bullets and the gun-toting store owner. The owner of the store ended up facing more serious charges than the robber for shooting a gun on a busy street, and he skipped bail and hasn't been seen since. Because he didn't show up to testify against the robber, there was no choice but to let the robber go free... except for the fact that he is an illegal alien, so he's facing consequences for that. And did I mention that the store owner is also an illegal alien as reported in a previous news story about the incident? Crazy story, read it for yourself here:

Crystal Lake, Illinois – *Efrain S. Castanon got lucky earlier this year when he managed to escape his foiled attempt to rob a Crystal Lake business without getting shot by its gun-toting owner.*

The South suburban man got lucky again Monday when that owner, fleeing from his own set of criminal charges, failed to appear in court to testify against him.

This time instead of bullets from owner Rafael Diaz, luck allowed Castanon, 39, of Worth, to evade a possible prison sentence as part of a deal with McHenry County prosecutors.

Under the deal, Castanon was sentenced to one year of non-reporting probation after admitting guilt to unlawful restraint and attempted theft stemming from the failed Jan. 28 holdup of Novedes Veracruz in Crystal Lake.

He also received a six-month jail term, but that is time served since his arrest in January.

Diaz's absence Monday left prosecutors with little choice by

the deal they cut with Castanon, Assistant McHenry County State's Attorney Mary Baccam said in court Monday.

"Rafael Diaz has fled the jurisdiction and is unavailable to testify for the state," she said.

Castanon initially faced up to 15 years in prison after authorities charged him with attempted armed robbery, attempted aggravated robbery and attempted robbery in connection with the holdup.

Police said Castanon was one of three men who entered the store about 3 p.m. that day armed with a gun and attempted to tie up owner Rafael Diaz and his wife while robbing them.

Diaz, authorities said, broke free, retrieved a handgun he kept in the store and chased the would-be robbers out, firing numerous shots in their direction as they fled along a heavily traveled section of Route 14.

Two of the men escaped in a car and have not been found since, but Castanon was left behind and arrested by police.

Because he fired at the men as they ran away down a busy street, authorities charged Diaz, 54, of Crystal Lake, with aggravated battery with a firearm, a felony more serious than those faced by Castanon.

Diaz posted a \$10,000 bond after his arrest and hasn't been seen by law enforcement since. A \$125,000 warrant for his arrest was issued in April.

Although Castanon is a free man as a result of his plea deal, he could remain locked up in the McHenry County jail on a hold by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

A Teacher CANNOT...

...tape a student to a chair. That's the lesson an Illinois man is learning after being sentenced to probation following an incident in a McHenry County classroom. Sorry Derek – this is really a story for your blog... you have my permission to steal it. Hopefully they cover not taping kids, especially special education students, to their chairs in Substitute Teaching 101? Here is the full story:

Substitute Teacher Gets Probation For Taping Unruly Student To Seat

A substitute teacher who taped a pair of rambunctious 8-year-old special education students to their seats was spared forced confinement himself Tuesday when a judge sentenced him to probation instead of prison on a pair of felony convictions.

Matthew Konetski, 32, of South Beloit, Ill., must serve two years probation, pay a \$1,500 fine and perform 80 hours public service under the sentence handed down by a McHenry County judge.

The sentence comes about six weeks after a jury found Konetski guilty of aggravated battery and unlawful restraint for a March 2006 incident in which he taped one of his students at Harvard's Jefferson Elementary School to his seat, then put tape over the boy's mouth when the boy would not sit still.

The taping, according to trial testimony, lasted between two and five minutes.

Authorities initially charged Konetski with doing the same to a second student, but prosecutors opted not to go to trial on those allegations.

The mother of the boy whose case did go to trial said she is

satisfied with the sentence.

"I never wanted to put him in jail," she said. "I just wanted him held accountable."

In a letter to the court, the mother said her son, who's been diagnosed with Pervasive Developmental Disorder, began acting out after the incident. At one point, she writes, the boy was hospitalized for more than 30 days.

"(He), 26 months later, still wakes up screaming 'Let me go!,' " the letter states.

During his trial, Konetski testified that he taped the boys as a last resort when they would not stop getting up in class. Although he was a first-year substitute with no special education training, Konetski was left alone with the special education students without two aides normally assigned to the class.

He apologized Tuesday for his actions, saying he never intended to harm or scare the boys.

"I was just trying to come up with a way to deal with a situation I didn't know how to deal with," he said.

County prosecutors had asked for a jail sentence along with the probation term, saying a stiff sentence would send a message to the public.

"(The victim) experienced being confined in his chair that day by this defendant," Assistant McHenry County State's Attorney Sharyl Eisenstein said. "We feel that he, in turn, should be confined in the McHenry County jail."

Konetski will not have to register as a sex offender because, Judge Sharon Prather ruled, there is no evidence his actions were sexually motivated.