

Plane stolen in the Keys is discovered in Cuba

A tourist vacationing in the Keys had his plane stolen in Marathon last week. The thief's final destination was Cuba.

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KEY WEST - A New York tourist vacationing in the Keys now knows the location of his Cessna 172 airplane, which was stolen last week from the Marathon Airport.

It's in Cuba. The 1978 plane, valued at \$78,000, was discovered in Cuba on Friday.

The pilot landed there due to mechanical problems, federal officials told the Monroe County Sheriff's Department.

Charges are expected to be filed against the pilot today in federal court, said Alicia Valle, spokeswoman for the U.S. Attorney's Office.

Federal officials said the man, who has not been identified, was accompanied by a young boy, but their relationship is unknown. The motive for the theft also is not known, whether it's a custody dispute, joy ride, kidnapping or something else, police said.

"Who knows? Maybe it's the same deranged pizza man again," said Peter Horton, director of airports for Monroe County.

In 2001, a Pizza Hut deliveryman named Milo John Reese stole a Cessna 172 from the Marathon Airport while attending a Florida Keys flight school. He was only given permission to take off, loop around the airport and land. Instead, Reese took off and headed south, crash-landing the plane on a rocky beach in Cuba.

In 2002, Reese made a deal with federal prosecutors in Miami and was given six months in prison and three years' probation.

Police identified the owner of the current stolen Cessna in Cuba as William Jones of New York.

He flew out of New York Sept. 25 with one passenger. They made a stop in Savannah, Ga., and landed in Marathon on Wednesday afternoon, according to the sheriff's report.

Jones did not discover his plane was missing until Saturday at 3 p.m. After a quick search of the small airport that borders U.S. 1, officials decided the plane had been stolen.

How the plane will be returned to the United States is still up in the air, authorities said