

Police say Bellagio bandit returned after heist - Forbes

Written by Administrator

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LAS VEGAS -- The bankrupt son of a Las Vegas judge followed a crude holdup at a posh casino by racking up hundreds of thousands of dollars in gambling losses and spending a week like a high roller, but got caught after trying to hawk his stolen chips online to

poker players, police said Thursday.

An arrest report for the helmeted bandit, who ran out of the Bellagio hotel-casino with \$1.5 million in chips during a gunpoint heist Dec. 14, said Anthony M. Carleo lost about \$105,000 at the resort over the next month - including \$73,000 on New Year's Eve. He stayed at least one week at the resort in late January, enjoying meals, drinks and rooms furnished by the casino.

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"He likes to gamble," Las Vegas police Lt. Ray Steiber said as he described for reporters how Carleo, 29, was nabbed late Wednesday on the same casino floor from where the chips came.

Carleo wasn't armed and offered no resistance when he was taken into custody.

Police recovered \$900,000 in chips of different types - the ones stolen ranged from \$100 to \$25,000 - and can account for \$1.2 million, Steiber said.

He said police were still looking for the black motorcycle they say Carleo used to make his pre-dawn getaway. Steiber wouldn't say whether police still believe the same man robbed the Suncoast casino in northwest Las Vegas at gunpoint early Dec. 8, although police previously said the same person was suspected in both heists.

According to the arrest report, Carleo's downfall came after he tried to broker sales of the highest value chips of \$25,000 through a well-known Web forum for poker players.

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Using the handle "Oceanspray 25" - a reference to the beverage company because \$25,000 chips are known to gamblers as "cranberries" for their color - Carleo traded e-mails and phone calls with another user who eventually led him to police, the arrest report said.

It said Carleo sold five \$25,000 chips to an undercover officer, and told him he had robbed the Bellagio.

Carleo's father, Las Vegas Municipal Court Judge George Assad, issued a statement saying he and his family were "devastated and heartbroken to see my son arrested under these circumstances."

Assad said that as a working judge, he couldn't comment about "any pending legal matter as it relates to anyone, including my son."

"I can say that as a prosecutor and a judge, I have always felt people who break the law need to be held accountable," he added.

Jail records showed Carleo was being held under the name Anthony M. Assad. The name was also used in Carleo's bankruptcy filing.

Carleo is a former real estate broker and student who declared bankruptcy in Colorado in May 2009. On his bankruptcy filing, he listed among his personal belongings a .40-caliber Taurus pistol.

His bankruptcy filing said Carleo received at least \$19,000 from his father over a three year period, but owed nearly \$188,000 in debts. The case was closed seven months later, and the firm that represented him in that case said Thursday that it was not currently representing him.

It wasn't immediately clear whether Carleo had a lawyer.

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Voting records in 2010 showed that Carleo lived at the same address as his father in Las Vegas.

His bail was set at \$15,000 on felony armed robbery and burglary charges. Court spokeswoman Mary Ann Price said he was due Monday for an initial appearance in Las Vegas Justice Court.

Carleo won't be required to appear when a judge reviews the charges against him on Friday, Price said.

A police statement early Thursday said Carleo would face a drug trafficking charge. But Steiber said that officials decided not to seek that charge, but he did not specify why.

Experts and police noted after the heist that stealing \$1.5 million in chips isn't like stealing \$1.5 million in cash.

Chips are unique to casino properties and are generally not interchangeable, although state regulations let casino companies redeem sister properties' chips with some restrictions.

Bellagio has since replaced its \$25,000 chips and announced plans to discontinue in April those designed like the ones stolen, setting a deadline for the thief to try to use them.

Steiber said investigators followed numerous tips in the case, and on Dec. 23 interviewed a Salvation Army bell ringer who tried to cash a \$25,000 Bellagio chip. He told police that a man he didn't know put the chip in his pocket while he was manning a charity collection bucket.

Bellagio officials would not say whether MGM Resorts International properties, which include the posh hotel-casino on the Strip known for its fountains, are among Las Vegas casinos that embed radio frequency devices inside the tokens.

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Police said it took less than three minutes for the robber to pull off the heist.

He entered the casino from Flamingo Road, strode fewer than 500 feet to a craps table, brandished the handgun at the 10 to 12 patrons and three or four dealers with chips piled on the green felt, scooped up the loot and ran.

Casino security officers didn't confront the robber, but a ceiling security video camera followed his path out the door. Police say a 911 call was placed to police while the man was still in the casino.

He was gone by the time police arrived.

Associated Press writers Cristina Silva and Ken Ritter in Las Vegas and news researcher Judith Ausuebel in New York contributed to this report.

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