

In The News 08.17.09

FORT LAUDERDALE

GPS tracks stolen tow trucks, culprits in Fort Lauderdale



With the aid of a GPS tracking system, a Fort Lauderdale tow truck owner tracked down two of his trucks that had been stolen.

These wreckers are headed back to First Response Towing and Recovery Saturday after being snatched and taken on a crime spree in Fort Lauderdale.

R.C. WHITE / FOR THE MIAMI HERALD

Photo BY TOLUSE OLORUNNIPA

TOLORUNNIPA@MIAMIHERALD.COM

Someone sneaked into a Fort Lauderdale towing company's parking lot in the dead of night, hoping the cover of darkness would conceal the heist of two wreckers.

What the culprits didn't know was that the Ford F-450s were equipped with high-end GPS tracking systems that would chart their every move over the next 36 hours.

Fort Lauderdale police arrested two men Saturday in the theft of the wreckers, which each had a Discrete GPS tracking program. Police used it to capture the suspects in the 1700 block of Northwest 13th Avenue, where various stolen items, including car rims, were located, said Fort Lauderdale police spokesman Sgt. Patrick Hart.

Police did not immediately identify the men.

Jason Parrett, owner of the Fort Lauderdale repossession truck company First Response Towing and Recovery, said the Global Positioning System units were crucial to finding the missing wreckers.

“Without it we wouldn't have found the trucks,” said Parrett, who has equipped all three trucks in his fleet with GPS technology.

Parrett said an employee called him early Saturday to tell him the two trucks were missing.

Once Parrett figured out which two trucks were gone, he asked his wife to pull up their locations on her BlackBerry, which is linked to their GPS units.

The program showed one of them was in Oakland Park and the other was in the Lauderdale Manors section of Fort Lauderdale, two areas where they would not normally be.

"I called some of my drivers and said, 'You go this way' and 'You go that way,'" Parrett said.

Within minutes, one of Parrett's drivers found the red Ford F-450 abandoned in an industrial area of Oakland Park. When the second driver, Will Cavanaugh, located the white Ford F-450 near the 1700 block of Northwest 13th Avenue, he saw a man jump into the truck and drive away.

He called police, and then followed the truck.

According to Parrett, who was talking to Cavanaugh and still tracking the truck's position, the man driving the truck realized he was being followed, sped away, abandoned the truck and then fled.

When the police arrived, Parrett gave them the GPS system's activity report, which showed where the trucks had been, places where they had been parked for extended periods and how fast they had been driven.

The police later arrested the two men in the 1700 block of Northwest 13th Avenue, one of the locations listed on the GPS report.

"The detailed activity reports in these are disgustingly accurate," Parrett said of the system, which cost him \$300 to install and \$20 a month for airtime for each of his three trucks.