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Former fugitive now in Fla. jail

BY AMY DRISCOLL

A fugitive for more than 30 years who fled a prison work program while serving time for an aggravated assault in Broward County is now back behind bars, at a North Florida prison medical center.

Jack Hazen, who assumed the name Charles Free after he absconded in 1976, was flown to the Lake Butler Reception and Medical Center on Friday, according to a spokeswoman for his Florida attorney, Don Pumphrey.

He had been held in a Las Vegas jail since his Jan. 30 arrest.

A Florida Department of Corrections cold-case squad tracked him down in Las Vegas, where he had married and raised a family who knew nothing of his criminal past.

Hazen, 61, is a Vietnam veteran who suffers from health problems, including multiple sclerosis and a brain tumor.

Gov. Charlie Crist signed an extradition order in March, returning him to Florida to complete his seven-year sentence.

His wife and children in Las Vegas, who knew him only as Charles Free, were stunned to find out about his life under a different name. They said he had always been an upstanding family man and solid citizen.

According to the police report from the 1975 crime, Hazen robbed a Pompano Beach 7-Eleven clerk at knife point, stealing money from the cash register. When police arrested him shortly after the crime, he told the officer: "I did it because I was hungry."

Hazen spent about 10 months in prison before he walked away from a Union County prison carpentry shop.