

Abducted boy's custody up to judge

Dad had taken baby to Mexico; concerns had been raised about mom

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By MATT STILES / The Dallas Morning News

A Dallas County family court judge could decide Wednesday whether an 8-month-old Grand Prairie boy abducted by his father last month will return to his mother's custody, authorities said.

Child welfare officials recovered the baby Sunday night when police arrested his father, Charles Leon Wood, at the San Antonio airport as he arrived from Mexico City.

"It's good that we were able to recover the child safely," said Detective John Brimmer, a Grand Prairie police spokesman.

The baby, Braeden Thomas Wood, arrived at Dallas Love Field on Monday night with an attorney appointed by a family court judge and immediately went into Child Protective Services custody. Braeden had been missing since Nov. 8, the day police say Mr. Wood used a stun gun on the boy's mother and abducted him.

It was unclear Monday why Braeden would not immediately be returned to his mother, who is Mr. Wood's estranged wife. Tiffany Wood could not be reached for comment.

Mr. Wood and a volunteer with a nonprofit group who worked to persuade him to return to Texas have raised allegations about her fitness as a parent, though it's not clear whether the charges have been publicly substantiated.

The baby will be placed in foster care until a judge decides the best placement, CPS spokeswoman Marleigh Meisner said.

"There is a custody issue between the two parents and the child," she said. "We're simply taking the child while the judge is deciding the custody issue."

The involvement of CPS and a court-appointed lawyer is "normal under the circumstances," said attorney John Schorsch of Dallas, who is representing Braeden's interests.

Mr. Schorsch said he spoke to Mr. Wood several times Friday and Saturday in an effort to get the father to turn himself in.

"If he had chosen to stay away, he could have," Mr. Schorsch said.

Two Grand Prairie police detectives traveled Monday to San Antonio to return Mr. Wood for an arraignment hearing Tuesday. They plan to charge him with two counts of violating a protective order, one count of interference with child custody and burglary of a habitation – a second-degree felony punishable by up to 20 years in jail, Detective Brimmer said.

Ms. Wood filed for divorce in June, after 16 months of marriage, and had temporary custody of Braeden, the couple's



Charles Wood

only child together.

According to court testimony and police reports, there were a series of physical confrontations before the divorce filing. Ms. Wood has said in court documents that Mr. Wood was threatening.

Two days after the abduction, during which police say Mr. Wood entered his wife's home through an unlocked back door, authorities issued an Amber Alert. Such alerts are typically not issued in custody cases. Police said the decision came after Mr. Wood told an attorney he would not be taken into custody alive.

Police and Dana Ames of the nonprofit United Response Search and Rescue have since tried to persuade Mr. Wood to return. Ms. Ames' group helps to find missing and abducted people.

As he eluded police, Mr. Wood made repeated calls to authorities and even to reporters in what Detective Brimmer described as "a cat-and-mouse game."

Mr. Wood, who was fired from his job a week before the abduction, finally agreed to come back to Texas and turn himself in, Detective Brimmer said.

But as Mr. Wood's Mexicana Airlines flight approached Texas, agents with the federal Bureau of Customs and Border Protection discovered the arrest warrants against him. The computer database search is routine, bureau spokeswoman Judy Turner said.

San Antonio International Airport police arrested Mr. Wood after he left the plane with the baby and more than \$16,000 in cash, some of it wadded in a diaper bag, she said.

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