

## **'Possibly 100 victims': Miami Shores man arrested in boat fraud case, accused of stealing nearly \$500K from boaters.**

The website for Up Boats LLC promises "the ultimate tender." A lightweight, custom carbon fiber boat.

Tom Stinnett was living in the Bahamas when he ordered a boat to ride to ride around with his friends. "This particular one, I was really pleased with the way it looked and the stability of the boat," Stinnett said.

He moved forward with the purchase, wire-transferring \$28,885 on Feb.7. The owner of Up Boats LLC promised his boat would be ready by the end of May.

But Tom says excuses and unanswered texts kept piling up as the delivery date approached. "The more I contacted him, the less he returned my phone calls, my texts, and my emails about the boat, and I knew I had a problem," Stinnett recalled.

### **Authorities Close In**

Opa-locka Police started investigating after getting calls from buyers saying they paid a man named Ricardo Deuker at Up Boats for boats, they never received.

Deuker was arrested on theft and fraud charges on November 11th.

"We received information that he was leaving for Mexico," said Sgt. Gabriela Llanes, Opa-Loca PD. "We don't know the reasons why he was leaving. So we detained him at the airport with the assistance of the Miami-Dade Sheriff's Office."

Police tell *7 Investigates* so far, they have found nearly half a million dollars in alleged fraud linked to Deuker, who also goes by the name Ric Ruthenberg. He currently faces 25 felony charges, including 13 counts of organized fraud and 12 counts of grand theft.

### **The Rising Toll on Consumers**

Since the arrest, 13 more boaters have contacted police, saying they never received their boats after paying for them. Sgt. Llanes added, "We have an ongoing investigation, and we believe that there's possibly 100 or more victims."

Even for those who received the product, the experience was devastating. Blaine Stevenson says his boat was delivered, but he says it was so poorly built that it sank. On top of the nearly \$12,000 he paid for the vessel; he had to pay for extensive repairs.

"And so, I live off an army retirement pension. So, this boat is three months' worth of my paycheck."

### **A Global Network of Boaters**

Stevenson started a Facebook page to find other people in the same 'boat' and was quickly sent a Reddit thread full of complaints from other boaters. "We didn't know anything about Reddit," Stevenson said. "I think if we had gone to Reddit, this thing would have blown up a lot sooner."

Stinnet decided to sue to get his money back. "I can't stand fraud and dishonesty," Stinnet said. "I, of course, would like the money back. I can use that money in my retirement account."

Police say it's too early to know if the boaters will ever see their money again, but they are asking all potential claimants to call them to file a complaint. Deuker is currently detained at Turner Guilford Knight Correctional Center and awaiting arraignment