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photo by Mitchell Glendening

A last bit of summer

Wednesday's winds were put to an enjoyable use by George Krejci in the Post Oak Mall parking lot. Krejci, a sophomore mechanical engineering student from Plano, prefers wind-surfing (on water) to wind-skating, but he said this was good practice — and good fun.

Hostage back home, ready to work again

United Press International
HOUSTON — Renaldo Franceschi says his more than five months as a captive of the Kurdish rebels in Iraq left him with a longing for Chinese food, but no need for a vacation.

Franceschi, a contracts manager in the Houston office of Calgary-based Atco Ltd., was reunited with his wife and two daughters Wednesday at Intercontinental Airport. He said he was ready to return to work Monday.

"I don't need a vacation," Franceschi, 40, said about his company's urging that he take some time off. "I feel very well. I was treated very well. I just didn't like their food."

"He's a very strong person," Atco spokesman Richard Strachan said. "He told the president of the company he wanted to go to work Monday." The president of the company urged him to take some time off.

His wife Millie teased, "He's a ham. He's loving this." Franceschi told reporters one of the first things he wanted was Chinese food.

The Puerto Rican-born executive, who normally carries 151 pounds on his 5-7 frame, lost 25 pounds during his captivity.

"He looks thin," Mrs. Franceschi said. "But he looks better than I expected. Give us a couple of months and we'll have him fattened up."

Franceschi asked, "Are you happy to see Papito?" as he embraced his wife and his two daughters, Cassandra, 11, and Tatiana, 9, after stepping off the plane from Calgary.

Franceschi was released two weeks ago with the help of the Iranian and Swiss governments, but Strachan said the family, on advice from the State Department and other hostages' families, chose to wait at home for him to arrive.

Atco had inquired at the State Department on its experience with the stress of the Iranian hostages who were suddenly returned home, and the hostages' families themselves gave Mrs. Franceschi support, she said.

"It was their decision," Strachan said of the family's determination to await Franceschi's return at their home in Katy, near Houston.

Franceschi and another Atco employee, Guy Boisvert, 23, of Montreal were captured by Kurdish rebels fighting for their independence from Iraq on May 2, while they were in Iraq for a few days to help install a hospital. Boisvert was released Sept. 27.

Franceschi spoke Oct. 3 with his wife by telephone from Tehran for the first time since his capture. He returned home through Switzerland and Canada for debriefing, medical checks and rest.

"I think they (the Kurds) were finally convinced of the fact that I had done nothing wrong," Franceschi said. "I had not violated any law. I was not a spy."

Atco makes prefabricated buildings and the Iraqi government contracted to have the hospital built in northern Iraq.

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