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KIDNAPPING INVESTIGATION

Ordeal has happy ending

La Bamba co-owner found in Indiana motel; 2 Mattoon men face charges

By STEVE BAUER
News-Gazette Staff Writer

CHAMPAIGN — Antonio Aguas stood silently with his brother, Ramiro Aguas, surrounded by Champaign police, FBI agents and a federal prosecutor at the Champaign Police Department on Monday.

That's quite a contrast to where he had been the past week.

Authorities said Monday that Antonio Aguas, 43, was kidnapped at gunpoint and held for more than \$250,000 ransom. The demands were made to Ramiro Aguas, 44, over a series of phone calls from locations across Illi-

nois and into Indiana.

Antonio and Ramiro Aguas own and operate the La Bamba restaurant chain, which includes two restaurants and corporate headquarters in Champaign and other restaurants across the Midwest, according to attorney Jeff Wampler, who acted as family spokesman Monday. Both Aguas brothers have lived in Champaign for 20 years.

Wampler said both brothers thank the FBI and Champaign police but would not make any other comments due to the pending investigation.

Antonio Aguas was rescued by law enforcement from a

motel room in Portland, Ind., on Friday. Also that day, two Mattoon men were arrested.

Police recovered ransom money, a gun and restraints, according to Assistant U.S. Attorney Rick Cox, who is prosecuting the case.

Adrian Lopez, 32, and Terence Merritt, 18, were charged in a federal criminal complaint with kidnapping.

Both made initial appearances at the U.S. District Court in Urbana on Monday. Magistrate Judge David Bernthal ordered both held without bond, Merritt until his trial and Lopez until Thursday, when he is due to return to federal court with a private attorney and have a pre-

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Antonio Aguas gets a hug from Champaign police Officer Brandon Thomas at a Monday press conference at the Champaign Police Department about the abduction of Aguas, co-owner of the La Bamba restaurant chain.