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**Did life imitate movie at O'Hare international terminal?: Romanian may have been living at airport**

**Annie Sweeney, The Chicago Sun-Times**

**A Romanian citizen who has been in the country illegally for more than a year and was stranded at O'Hare Airport for several days is now in the custody of immigration officials.**

**Whether Marcel Macovei, 26, was living full time at O'Hare -- as Tom Hanks' Hollywood character did in the 2004 movie "The Terminal" -- is not entirely clear. But security officers spotted him several times between Feb. 21 and March 2 in Terminal 5, the international terminal. U.S. customs agents even took up a collection to help him get home.**

#### **U.S. MARRIAGE NEVER HAPPENED**

**Macovei was turned over to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement March 2, and he now awaits a deportation hearing.**

**"We have not been able to confirm that he was living at the airport," said Wendy Abrams, a spokeswoman for the city Department of Aviation.**

**"What we do know from reports is that baggage handlers and Department of Aviation Security encountered him in T5 more than once."**

**Macovei came to Chicago in December 2004 with a visa that allowed him to stay 90 days because he planned to marry a U.S. citizen.**

**Officials say the marriage -- to a woman who became a U.S. citizen in the 1990s -- never happened. But Macovei stayed.**

**He surfaced at O'Hare Feb. 21, when Department of Aviation security officers saw him and had a brief conversation with him. Although his English was limited, security officers were led to believe he was not homeless, Abrams said.**

**Then they saw him again Feb. 26. The officers took him to the U.S. customs office in the terminal, where they asked for a translator and were told the Romanian consulate would be contacted.**

Macovei told customs agents during the Feb. 26 meeting that "he was interested in going home and didn't have money," said Cherise Miles, a U.S. Customs and Border Protection public affairs officer.

#### **TAKING UP A COLLECTION**

When Aviation Department officers spotted Macovei again two days later, they also tried to reach the consulate, then returned him to the customs office.

There, agents said they were taking up a collection to try to help Macovei get back to Romania, Abrams said, citing Aviation Department reports.

Miles could not confirm that any collection was taken up to help Macovei, but she said customs officers at the airport were calling social service agencies and the Romanian consulate between Feb. 26 and March 2 to try to find help for Macovei. It was not the first time someone who was "stranded" had come looking for help, Miles said.

After U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement detained Macovei March 2, he was taken to the McHenry County jail -- which has a contract to house illegal immigrants -- and will be held until he has a hearing within about a two weeks.

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