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The Pocono Record

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17

'Phone Phreak' jailed for 3 to 6 months

By MIKE JOSEPH

Pocono Record Reporter

STROUDSBURG — 'King of the Phone Phreaks' John T. Draper was sentenced Friday to spend three to six months in Monroe County jail for possessing devices to steal telecommunications services.

Judge Harold A. Thomson pronounced the sentence in a Monroe County courtroom crowded with Bell Telephone executives, FBI agents, curious Stroudsburg lawyers and a half dozen Draper fans who came from such long-distance locations as Berkeley, Calif.

Draper, 34, a long-haired electronics wizard whose national reputation arose in California, pleaded guilty to the charge in June. He was arrested last October after he and his computer turned up in a Canadensis residence.

Judge Thomson told him Friday: "Mr. Draper, you are a very unusual person and this is not a usual case. It's been alluded to that you are a genius and if you are not a genius you come very close to it.

"But you have disregarded the rights of society and placed yourself above society. It's been said that you just want to be left alone. Certainly everyone else has a right to be left alone, including telephone companies.

"You have unusual ability but you have used it no differently than a common thief."

Draper also was fined \$500. Because he has credit for about one month already served in jail, he will be eligible for parole in about two months.

Thomson denied a request from defense lawyer George Goldstein to postpone Draper's incarceration and sheriff Forrest Sebring led him to jail.

The plea bargain between Goldstein and Assistant District Attorney Ralph Matergia in June included an agreement that Draper would get back his computer, which was described by his friends as the size of a small suitcase, with a video screen and tape recorder attached.

The computer became an issue after sentencing Friday because it took the threat of a court order from Thomson to free it from the state police barracks at Swiftwater, according to Goldstein.

Goldstein told a reporter after the sentencing it was his observation that the telephone company used an unusually strong hand in the prosecution. "My personal opinion is that Bell Telephone bought this prosecution," he said.

Goldstein said even though Matergia had studied the electronics material thoroughly and nailed down the prosecution's side of the case, the phone company hired a special assistant prosecutor. Goldstein added that the phone company treated the state troopers to lunch.

Three character witnesses for Draper testified at the sentencing in an effort to ward off a jail term.

They represented business which, they said, depended on Draper's consulting work in computer programming to complete projects now under way. They said later that jailing Draper is a waste of time and talent.

"His brain power is our project. Without him we don't stand a chance," said Larry Weiss, a bearded engineer who works for Receiving Studios, a Berkeley, Calif., music studio.

Weiss said Draper was currently programming computers to blend the tonal output of 16 32-track tape systems.

Lenwood Stephens is the 34-year-old founder and president of UBC Grain Co., a Philadelphia area corporation that sells imported and manufactured novelties.

Stephen, who said his corporation took in \$5 million in revenue last year, added that he depended on Draper's knowledge to organize a 40-man sales force that handles 1,200 lines of items.

"It's a waste of time to put him (Draper) in jail. He's being very productive to society," said Stephens, whose long hair was pulled back in a pony tail. "He's not a criminal, he's a showoff."

In other court action Friday, Ronald Blake McKinney, 23, of Paradise Township, was sentenced to two and a half to five years in Graterford State Correctional Institution and fined \$1,000 for the burglary in March of Stoeckel's Jewelry Store, 619 Main St., Stroudsburg. Six watches valued in all at about \$600 were taken in the burglary.

Gery L. Krewson, 24, of Mount Pocono, was sentenced to six months probation and fined \$200 for the theft in March of four books and three magazines from the library at East Stroudsburg State College.