



Exploding The Phone

db606

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Bibliographic Cover Sheet

Title **Phone Cheater Rings Up A New Job**

Publication *Star Ledger*

Date 1971-06-21

Author(s) AP

V/I/P p. 11

Abstract Joe Engressia has found work at Millington telephone. Discusses Engressia's youth and his arrest in 1971, South Central Bell, and Ray Churchill.

Keywords Joe Engressia; Babe Howard; Ray Churchill

Notes May be duplicate of db194.

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WHISTLED FOR FREE CALLS

Phone cheater rings up a new job

MEMPHIS (AP) — Josef Carl Engressia Jr., who became interested in telephones because of his blindness and says he learned to call around the world without being billed for it, starts his first job today—with a telephone company.

"I guess they'll have me do whatever I can that they need done; maybe I can work on the test board," said Engressia, 22. He will be a \$2-an-hour employe of the Millington Telephone Co., a small independent in suburban Memphis.

It is his second recent encounter with a telephone company. Earlier this year he was arrested and charged with defrauding South Central Bell by using mouth whistles amplified by a specially built electronic device to make long distance calls and bypass the company's billing equipment.

He says he could call for free anywhere in the country or in the world and once even called around the world and talked to himself on a second telephone.

Engressia was fined \$10 and given a 60-day suspended jail sentence after being convicted of malicious mischief in the South Central Bell case. City Court Judge Ray Churchill noted that there was no legal record of the alleged calls and threw out the fraud charges on grounds of insufficient evidence. He found Engressia guilty instead of malicious mischief.

"I can understand how he was driving them crazy," the judge said.

During a weekend interview, Engressia said that as a child his main contact with people, because of his blindness, was the telephone. So he called people and talked to them.

He said he first became interested in the technical aspects at the age of seven when a "mean babysitter" put a lock on his telephone. He learned to circumvent that and dial by using the disconnect buttons.

* * *

He grew up in Miami where his family still lives and spent 4½ years as a mathematics major at the University of Southern Florida. He had a friend in college build the electronic device that converted his whistle into a multifrequency sound and allowed him to circumvent long distance billing equipment.

He moved to Memphis earlier this year looking for a job.

He says he developed the whistling technique by trial and error after discovering that touch tone telephones, when dialed, made a tone he could duplicate.

"I used to place calls all over the world with those whistles," Engressia said. "Australia and West Germany used to be two of the easiest places to call. And once I called the American Embassy in Moscow and asked them what kind of phone they had."

He said he had two telephones in his room and decided to call himself around the world to see how long it would take the sound of his

voice to go in one receiver and out the other. "It took eight seconds," he reported.

Engressia said with tongue in cheek that the telephone company should not be upset about that particular incident because, "technically, it was a local call."

But his hobby was found out, he says, when he complained to South Central Bell

about the difficulty of placing some calls. The company, upon investigating, found that he had not been billed for them, he said. So they investigated further.

W. S. (Babe) Howard, president of Millington, offered Engressia a job after hearing of the charges placed against the young man by South Central Bell.

"It will be interesting to see just how far a blind person can go in this business," Howard said.

Engressia says he has high hopes.

"I think having that job will be the solution to many of my problems," he said.

And he said he is finished with attempting illegal long distance calls for free.