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Whistling Phone Fancier Heads For Mountain

By THOMAS BEVIER

The following news probably will result in some large sighs of relief among the executives of South Central Bell:

Josef Engressia has left town.

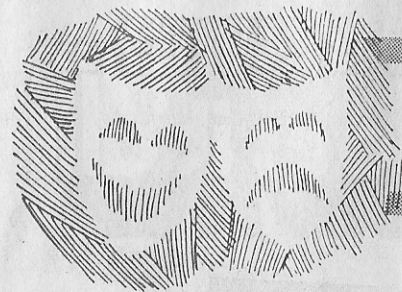
So long, Memphis. Hello, Denver, and all you fine people at Mountain Bell.

Engressia, you may recall, is the blind man who got in trouble with South Central Bell in 1971 because he has an uncanny ability to make calls to anywhere in the world without paying for them. He did it by whistling and through the use of a device called a "blue box" which impresses tones on the telephone network and circumvents operators.

For a number of reasons — because he is blind, because he usually only made calls to learn more about the telephone system and because he probably is a genius — he was let off with a \$10 fine and a promise to stop whistling.

Several days ago, before making his move, Engressia sat reading a Braille edition of the AT&T annual report and talked about his decision to leave town.

"It hangs kind of heavy in Mem-



phis," he said. "People just think of me as that little blind kid who plays with phones. All that was was a little insignificant whistling."

He said he chose Denver because "from what I have read I have feeling about different areas of the country." He said he has dreamed of living in a high-rise apartment with an indoor swimming pool since he was in the third grade and that he has found such a place in Denver.

"I called information and had them give me 10 telephone numbers for high rises out of the phone book," he said. "I remembered them. The first place I called, I got a real nice lady. I rented it for (\$225) a month. It's a big building, like a beehive, with people all around me so I won't get lonely. If my phone goes out, I can use someone else's."

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He does not have a job but has savings which he hopes will tide him over until he finds employment in Denver. After his trouble in 1971, he worked about two years for Millington Telephone Co. using his perfect pitch to listen for imperfections in the system.

"We parted on friendly terms," said W. S. 'Babe' Howard, president of the company. "Joe has a wonderful brain on him. But he'll talk to anyone. I guess he thought I was too restrictive. Once a guy called up and wanted to know what he'd have to do to tie up a whole telephone system. Joe told him. He just trusted everybody."

Engressia, 26, swore he has not made an illegal call since his brush with the law. He said his monthly bill

sometimes ran more than \$100. The number of incoming calls he received must have been staggering. He said he talks five or six hours a day on the phone.

After he left Millington Telephone Co., he worked for a company, which recently went bankrupt, selling correspondence courses over the telephone.

Howard and others who know Engressia speak with wonder about his technical knowledge of the telephone system and of his ability to memorize numbers. He claims a "vocabulary" of 30,000 telephone numbers. He can, for instance, give from memory the numbers of major newspapers in U. S. cities.

In Colorado, he hopes to get a master's degree in telecommunications. He also plans to become active in the Denver chapter of Mensa, an organization limited to those with an IQ of more than 148.

He also is looking forward to the Mountain Bell telephone system. He said it is more sophisticated than South Central Bell's. For one thing, it is more fully computerized.

And for another, "Denver has international dialing."

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Josef Engressia

— Staff Photo