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Whistle Has Connections

By RICH OPPEL

TAMPA (AP) — Blind college student Joe Engressia whistled his way past long distance circuits and placed free calls across the nation until he was found out by telephone officials.

Although the telephone company doesn't want to prosecute him, and at one point considered hiring him, Engressia may find himself disconnected from college and on the carpet before a federal judge.

Engressia, 19, blind since birth, said he made about \$25 placing calls for students at the rate of \$1 each when his thriving young business was upended by authorities.

"THE GUYS IN THE dormitory were calling me 'The Whistler' and I was making call after call after call," Engressia said. "Crowds of up to 40 people would follow me around."

Engressia, who said he is equipped with perfect pitch, said he found he could place calls by whistling varying series of a precise tone over the receiver. The tone can vary only 5 per cent, plus or minus, from 2,600 cycles per second.

The end came when Engressia was trying to call a Long Island, N.Y., number for a student but got the Memorial operator. He asked her to help him dial the correct Long Island number.

"She was suspicious and monitored the call. Naturally the

student I put the call through for talked extensively about the 'whiz kid' who had placed his free call," he said. "The operator broke in and managed to get the student to identify himself and where he was calling from."

TELEPHONE COMPANY officials contacted University of South Florida administrators, who soon tracked down Engressia.

He was called before the dean of men and told he would be "allowed to withdraw" for the rest of the quarter or face suspension.

Said The Whistler: "I don't want to withdraw. I've got between an 'A' and 'B' average."

"I think he'd be an asset to our company," said H. E. Mason, security officer for General Telephone Co. "But I don't think he will be able to work for us because he'd have to be on part-time basis."

Mason said the firm decided it had nothing to gain by prosecuting a blind college student, but added that he had turned over "evidence" in the case to the FBI.

To make a toll-free call, said the youth, he would dial long distance information to any city. Before the operator answered, he said, he would whistle the area code. If it were 212, for instance, he would whistle rapidly twice, pause, whistle once, pause, then twice again — all at 2,600 cycles. Then he would whistle the seven-digit local number in the same manner.



JOE ENGRESSIA

... whistling different tune.