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Telephone Whistler Connects, Permitted To Stay In School

TAMPA, Fla. (AP)— Blind student Joe Engressia, who whistled his way through long distance telephone circuits with perfect pitch and placed free calls across the nation, will be permitted to remain in school.

Although the telephone company did not want to prosecute, Engressia was temporarily disconnected from the University of South Florida.

The dean called him on the carpet and told the 19-year-old youth, blind since birth, he would be allowed to withdraw from school for the remainder of the quarter or face suspension.

"I didn't want to withdraw," Engressia said. "I've got between an 'A' and 'B' average and want to stay in school."

Engressia appealed the ruling and the school's Board of Appeals notified him Wednesday he would be allowed to continue in school.

The board placed him on probation until the end of the quarter in March and ordered him to pay \$25 to "a worthy cause."

Engressia said he had made \$25 on calls by whistling to dial the number wanted.

To make the call, he would whistle the area code. If it were 212, for instance, he would whistle rapidly twice, pause, whistle once, pause and then twice again—all at 2,600 cycles in perfect pitch.

Then he would whistle the seven-digit local number in the same manner.

Sound is measured by the number of vibrations each second in the sound wave. The General Telephone Co., said their equipment and Engressia's whistle apparently were on the same wave-length.

Engressia said he first realized his talent at the age of eight, when he jumbled a call by whistling while waiting for the party to answer. He has been studying telephones ever since.

"I know all about them," he

said. "As a small child, I was fascinated with the sounds that came out of the phone."

Engressia had a thriving little business going with his dormitory buddies until a sharp telephone operator uncovered his scheme. He would make calls for \$1 each.

"I think the verdict was very favorable," Engressia said. "I'm happy that I can stay in school."

10—The Herald-Tribune
Dec. 12, 1968

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