

## **FORT LAUDERDALE NEWS, September 28, 1983**

### **“Phone official testifies about dying man’s call”**

**by Helen Rojas**

As the final minutes of Joey Vendola’s young life slipped by on a dangling telephone receiver, frantic 911 operators called Southern Bell for help.

Bell employees said they couldn’t give any, a company assistant manager testified Tuesday in Broward Circuit Court. The trace operator was out to lunch and couldn’t tell police where Vendola was, he said.

“She calls me back and she tells me the man is out to lunch,” recalled manager William Atkinson of the call he received from a Bell operator. “I tell her we can’t do the trace immediately and to see if the Sheriff’s Office still needed the trace.”

They did, but the wait was hopeless. When Bell operators finally managed to trace the call after almost two hours, they gave the police three wrong addresses because of a switch in telephone lines.

Now, four years after Vendola died, lawyer Sheldon Schlesinger claims the 19-year old’s death could have been avoided. In a trial that began last week in Judge George Richardson’s courtroom, Schlesinger claims Vendola’s parents are entitled to compensation from the multimillion-dollar company.

To prove his point Monday, Schlesinger set the clock in Courtroom 1040 at 12:23 p.m., the same time Vendola apparently shot himself in the stomach on July 8, 1979, because of worries over minor drug charges he was facing in court the next day. Then he played tape of Vendola’s change of heart, a call for help to 911.

Over the next 114 minutes, jurors first listened to Vendola rasp the words “ambulance” and “quick” into the phone and then lapse into moans. No matter how they coaxed, operators for the Broward Sheriff’s Office could not get Vendola to reveal where he was.

When they called Southern Bell for a trace, BSO operators didn’t discover until nearly 1 p.m. that the necessary operator was on his regularly scheduled lunch break, a transcript of the tape show. And when they finally got an address, it was the wrong one, according to the transcript.

“This is number 484-2022 is not listed in my cross-reference and that address, 2241 NW 41 Street, should be right in the middle of a lake in Lauderdale,” an exasperated BSO operator told the Bell technician, according to the transcript.

Two tries later and police still had no luck finding Vendola. It wasn’t until his girlfriend stumbled upon Vendola in his bedroom that police finally found him – dead.

In court depositions, a Broward medical examiner testified Vendola probably would have lived had he received proper medical attention within 45 minutes. A Southern Bell supervisor testified most emergency traces require on 15 minutes.

But the lawyer representing Southern B3ell claims Vendola could not have been saved and that he has medical experts to present the defense for this case later this week.

“The evidence is going to show that about 12:23 or shortly thereafter he was in irreversible shock,” Heinrich said. “When he goes into this irreversible shock, the end is in sight.”