

Coconut Telegraph

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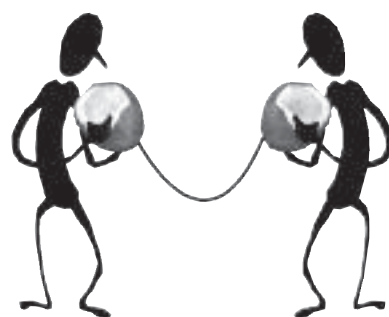
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Editorial: Autophobic Man

Last year a 2-page slanderous flyer about the Coconut Telegraph was distributed at the Murray Nelson Government Center, local clubs and businesses. It stated that the Coconut Telegraph's "efforts are at attacking veterans", and "The editor of the Coconut Telegraph is a plus-size, moo moo wearing, autophobic, drunk who uses her little newspaper to draw attention to herself." This long diatribe had to have taken many hours or even days of researching my website on the internet to twist my words into a 2-page attack on my newspaper, my family and myself. Everyone that knows me knows that I am not against veterans and just in the 7 years with

the Coconut Telegraph I have helped the community and veterans a whole lot, so much that I can't fit it all in this column plus what I did before the newspaper. I am very proud of the veterans in my family and I am a member of the American Legion Ladies auxiliary and the VFW Ladies Auxiliary At Large. The damaging flyer was UNSIGNED, however, Monroe County Veteran's Affairs employee Gary Johnson and his wife were seen handing out the flyers all around town. I wrote a letter of complaint to Mr. George Brentnall, Gary Johnson's boss at Veteran's Affairs, who responded with a letter dated 7/31/2012 that Mr. Johnson "denies writing and circulating the



Gary Johnson.

letter" and if I want to refute Mr. Johnson's statement to provide him with notarized statements that he is in fact circulating these letters on county time and he will pursue it further. Hmmmm. Interesting.

They did not realize that I have a website tracker with which I can tell who has been

visiting the site and spending how many hours, even days, etc., on it. I narrowed down the IP address to, you guessed it, the Murray Nelson Building, where Gary Johnson has his office! That office and his salary are paid for by our tax dollars. With a Veterans Affairs office in Key West and Marathon, do we really need one in Key Largo if the man operating it can spend that many hours researching my website and composing a 2-page flyer to defame me? Why would anyone be so vicious and vindictive to a "little" newspaper?

My next step was to hire an attorney who could help. Russ Cullen sent out a public records request letter. What we got back were emails between Johnson and Brentnall and a note that said they would send the rest of our request later.

In one email dated 7/25/2012 Johnson tells Brentnall that he was available to help Debra Barnes, former bartender and canteen manager of the VFW distribute 'her' flyers during his free time but "she says she has it covered." Soon after that my advertisers and many local businesses received letters again slandering myself and the Coconut Telegraph. I have copies of 4 different damaging letters that went out to my advertisers on 4 different occasions, and all were unsigned. Why weren't the letters signed? Who paid for the postage?

Last week I received an email from Debra Barnes who said she in fact did not write the letters and that "Gary came in one day with a stack of those letters and told me to leave them out for everyone to read. When they were all gone he instructed me to make more copies to

be passed around. He stated that he'd already distributed them to various businesses."

A couple of days later I received an email from the former commander of the VFW, Eric Shear. Here is part of his email:

Hi Denise...Eric Shear here. The hits just keep comin'.

FACT: Gary Johnson wrote the letters regarding you and your paper.

PROOF: He told me he did.

FACT: Gary Johnson used county time and resources to prepare and print the letters.

PROOF: He told me he did.

FACT: Gary Johnson denied involvement in this issue when confronted by his boss.

PROOF: He told me he did.

FACT: Gary Johnson came into the VFW one Saturday afternoon waving those letters over his head and stated "these are for here, we have been all over delivering these" and he placed them on the table by the pull

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tab machine. Deb was tending bar...she could not have been helping him.

PROOF: I was there and witnessed it.

I have resigned as Commander of the VFW effective 2/6/13 because of Gary Johnson.

I thought I was done with that guy, but now I am hearing he has accused Deb of being the author of the hateful, petty letters about you.

I will be available to meet with Russ Cullen... sign a sworn statement, deposition, polygraph...whatever.

—Eric Shear

In a personal Facebook message from Gary Johnson to me and unsigned letters mailed to businesses about me Mr. Johnson calls me "autophobic". In all my years with newspapers I had never heard that word before. No one I mentioned it to had ever heard it before either. It means "an irrational fear of one's self."

Is it a coincidence Mr. Johnson uses that word and it also appears in one of the unsigned letters? I think not. Who is the autophobic person here? The one who is afraid to sign their name! The one with a twisted vendetta against a "little" newspaper? A public official paid by us?

Now as a newspaper publisher I get some really weird mail but I have never been personally attacked like this before. My family and I are being attacked at a cost to the taxpayers of Monroe County!

Anyone who would like to send Mr. George Brentnall comments may do so at the Veterans Affairs Department, Harvey Government Center, 1200 Truman Avenue, Suite 204, Key West, FL 33040. Phone 305-295-5150.

Please contact me with any additional information. TheConchTelegraph@gmail.com.

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