

The QCSD vs. Gazette article

Sunday, July 5, 2009 11:55 AM

From: Randy Kraft

To: mbarry.t21

Andrejko, Lisa

Richard Woldow

Linda A. Martin

Stein, Erica

Paul Stepanoff

Manuel Alfonso

Kathy Mosley

I want all key parties to know this at the same time.

I object to this sentence being inserted into the fifth paragraph of my article about the QCSD superintendent and The Gazette: "And the discussion dominated the meeting, whose routine business was trumped by anger and hostility toward the newspaper."

I did not write that sentence. It was inserted into an article bearing my name without my knowledge or consent. As anyone who attended that school board meeting knows, the statement is entirely untrue. The discussion most certainly did NOT dominate the school board meeting. (And I'm not even going to get into the fact that it was poorly written: since when is a meeting a "who"???)

I also object to Richard Woldow's name being removed from the sixth paragraph of my article. This is what I wrote: "Alfonso told the board he had received a complaint from Richard Woldow, opinion columnist at The Gazette, that the district's administration refused to provide the following information to the paper: high school graduation photos, honor roll lists and contacts for sports coaches."

If a formal complaint had come from owner Mark Barry to the entire school board, a significantly different conversation might have taken place at that board meeting. But the fact that the complaint came from Mr. Woldow -- and that was mentioned at the very start of the discussion -- inflamed the situation and heavily influenced everything that happened next. His name should not have been moved down to the second half of the article. It belonged where I put it. Burying it diminished the balance and accuracy of my reporting.

This sentence is absolutely untrue and I did not write it: "Mosley claimed the request for information did not come from management of The Gazette, but from opinion columnist Richard Woldow." I already stated the complaint came from Woldow at the top of the article, but that was removed. Again, everyone attending the board meeting heard Mr. Alfonso say it came from Richard Woldow. There would have been absolutely no need for Ms. Mosley to "claim" it came from him.

This is what I wrote in that spot: "Mosley said the request for information did not come from management of The Gazette, but from an opinion columnist. Alfonso said Woldow was passing on a complaint from The Gazette's management."

The headline is inaccurate: Andrejko issued no edict to keep student achievements out of the newspaper.

The front page head is an editorial headline, not a news headline: Student achievements banned from newspaper.(Exhibit A: The graduation article I wrote, which has not yet run, lists names of all seniors who graduated with top honors, right out of the commencement program. No one banned me from using those names in the newspaper.)

For the record, I did not write the paragraph the begins: "A review of the archives...." I have no problem with that, if someone did indeed review the archives. But I did not do it and I was not informed that such a review had been conducted.

As a journalist, I walk a tightrope every time I write an article. I do my very best to be accurate, honest and fair to all sides. Never is that tightrope more more slippery than when I am writing about my own employer. I commended, and commend, Mr. Barry for showing journalistic integrity by running the article critical of his newspaper and its columnist.

But after it was out of my hands, changes were made that were just wrong.

When I e-mailed the completed article to Mr. Barry, I included the following:

"I request that you do not show this article to Richard before publication. That would be absolutely unfair, because we're not showing it to any of the others quoted in the article.(I never do that....although I will read back a sentence or three.... for fact-checking/accuracy purposes only.) I already pretty much told Richard what part of his comments I will be using.

"I do have my objectivity to protect. And, because Richard said he will be writing about this in his column, I don't want it to look like collusion. I keep telling people who are skeptical that he does not control what I write or how I write it, nor does he edit what I write.

"I also would not want stuff drawn out of my article and put into his column.

"It would be even more unfair if he would be permitted to make any unilateral changes to the article.

"I'm NOT suggesting you will share it with him, or that he would make any changes if you did.

" If YOU feel any changes have to be made, I'd (always) like to be the one to make them."

For the record, while I have not studied it word-for-word, most of the article appears to be as I wrote it. I can't publicly undo what has been done, under my byline. But I do want the facts to be known because I have my own personal and professional reputation to protect.

I request that this does not happen again.

Randy Kraft