



COMSTOCK CHRONICLE

Covering Storey County and Virginia City News

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STOREY COUNTY ANSWERS CITIZEN'S CONCERNS

By Las Swanson

In response to two separate leaks of information to media outlets, certain questions were posed to Storey County in response to public queries. These leaks were of information considered by Storey County to be confidential in nature. They pertained to two separate matters. They were leaked in two separate incidents. The first leak consisted of documents that are part of an ongoing investigation into the death of a Storey County resident. The second leak, a considerable time later, pertains to a report received by Storey County into the investigation of alleged prohibited conduct by an elected official.

Not only do these repeated leaks question the integrity of our system and make Storey County look inept but they may have a less than desirable impact on the matters they pertain to as well as the individuals involved in those matters. In my opinion, this is serious. I would have expected someone in a position of authority to be issuing a statement to let citizens know what happened, that the county takes this breach very seriously, offer a little information on what steps are being taken to remedy this situation and prevent further occurrences; offer an acknowledgement and reassurance of some kind.

I don't recall that happening. So, when people said to me, "No one will say anything. Nothing will be done. It will be swept under the rug," a part of me wondered if that could possibly be true.

Ever the believer in good and unable to accept that something like this could pass unmentioned or unaddressed, I passed the as yet unanswered questions on to those in the county most likely to be able to answer and shared with readers that answers were forthcoming; an optimistic assumption on my part.

I'm very happy to report to all the cynics that not only did the county respond but did so earlier than they promised. For those who have a genuine interest as opposed to those who just like to grumble, I'll share the information contained in the county's response.

Storey County does, in fact, have a policy for dealing with a leak of confidential information. Specifically, it is Policy 031 and page two, item A six reads: *Confidential documents, reports and papers and private correspondence should not be leaked to the media. If such leaks do occur, an investigation will take place to establish who was responsible and appropriate action will result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.*

I was also provided with Storey County Policy 032: Records Management. This policy acknowledges an obligation to responsibly manage records, states that all Storey County Departments and/or Divisions shall follow the Nevada State Library and Archives Records Management Local Government Records Retention Schedule and addresses destruction of records. *"Confidential records must be destroyed in such a manner that the information can no longer be reconstructed."* While it is good to know that Storey County has a policy in place for the destruction of confidential information, I don't think this offers anything specifically to the matter at hand.

We asked if there would be any action taken to determine the source of these leaks. *"Storey County is taking the allegation seriously and accordingly is conducting a thorough investigation whether any unauthorized release of confidential information did or did not occur and by who if such did occur."*

This is almost the public statement that I was expecting in the beginning except it doesn't acknowledge that Storey County confidential information somehow found its way to a member of the media and was then shared in newspapers, online and in an anonymous mail campaign. I guess what they mean to say is that they're in the process of determining if this leak did or did not occur *within* the Storey County system?

We asked, if a leak is not suspected inside Storey County, is there another theory as to how the media obtained this confidential information. Their response, *"Storey County is in the process of investigating whether an unauthorized release of*

confidential information did or did not occur. It is most appropriate that a response to this question takes place after our investigation is complete."

I absolutely agree that, in order to preserve the integrity of their investigation and bolster a possible speedy and productive outcome, any theories in this regard should be deferred. But waiting is not something the citizens of Storey County do well. The less patient amongst us may say, "By golly, we want answers and we want them now! We are entitled! And, if answers won't be provided, that must mean there is a cover up!" However, if we were to find ourselves personally involved in a matter of this type, we would greatly appreciate the public allowing the investigative and judicial systems to handle the matter appropriately. It is my desire to extend this same courtesy to those who do find themselves involved. I am willing to defer my curiosity and trust in the system and those the public has chosen to administer that system in order to assist the process of resolution.

I asked if there might be leaks in addition to the two that we've been made aware of. The county responded, *"This topic may be tied to investigatory work currently underway at the District Attorney's Office. It is best that this inquiry is sent to the District Attorney's Office so that an appropriate response may be provided."*

A copy of this County email response to me was also provided to the District Attorney's Office (on 9-21) but I received no response to this question from them. I assume the DA's office could tell me no more than what was already provided. If they should provide something of interest at a later date, I'll be certain to share it with readers.

Who would investigate the possibility of a leak? Would it be the Sheriff's Office, Courthouse Security or perhaps an independent investigator?

See ANSWERS, Page 28

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WEEKEND WEATHER

Friday



High 66°
Low 34°
Sunny
Rise: 7:01 AM
Set: 6:31 PM

UV Index: 5 of 10
Thunderstorms: 0%
Precipitation: 0%
Wind: ESE 8 MPH

Saturday



High 73°
Low 38°
Sunny
Rise: 7:02 AM
Set: 6:29 PM

UV Index: 5 of 10
Thunderstorms: 0%
Precipitation: 0%
Wind: ESE 7 MPH

Sunday



High 74°
Low 41°
Mostly Sunny
Rise: 7:02 AM
Set: 6:27 PM

UV Index: 5 of 10
Thunderstorms: 0%
Precipitation: 0%
Wind: SSW 8 MPH

FREE HEALTH FAIR

October 8th

9 am to 3:30 pm

Mark Twain
Community Center

**Everyone
Welcome!**

OPEN BURN SEASON 2016

Submitted

The following advisory is being provided by the Storey County Fire Protection District.

The Western Region will be lifting fire restrictions that have been in place since May 30, 2016. Restrictions will expire at 12:01 a.m., Friday morning, September 30, 2016.

Decreasing daily sunlight, increasing fuel moisture levels, and cooler evening temperatures are allowing us to lift fire restrictions; However, the potential threat for wildfires remains, so we encourage the public to continue enjoying their Federal, County, State, and private lands responsibly by being very careful with any fire.

Storey County Fire Protection District is planning to allow residents to resume open burning on October 1, 2016. All burn permits will be issued electronically this year. To renew, obtain or apply for a new burn permit please contact Patty Blakely at 775-847-0954. Open burning on private land still requires a permit and a burn permit MUST be obtained prior to any open burning.

Recreationists are reminded to be fire safe with all their outdoor activities, including insuring that campfires are dead out. Leaving campfires unattended is a class B misdemeanor. Other important reminders for all outdoor enthusiasts include the following:

- Target practice - use of tracer rounds, steel-core ammunition or exploding targets (Tannerite®, Shock Wave, Sonic Boom) including Binary Explosive Targets while recreational shooting is prohibited.
- Riding motorcycles/ATVs without a spark arrester and smoking carelessly is prohibited.
- The use of propane stoves is preferred over campfires and charcoal grill fires in these dry conditions.
- **Fireworks are always illegal** to possess and use on all Federal and Nevada's State, County and private lands.
- Firewood cutters must have a chainsaw with a functioning, approved spark arrester screen on the exhaust.
- Welding, grinding or operating an acetylene torch with open flames, is allowed only by permit.

Storey County is preparing for a potentially high-risk wildfire season next year and is asking property owners to assess, be proactive in preparing and being aware of their fire risk.

To learn more about defensible space please visit www.firewise.org. To learn more about the You Call We Haul Trailer Program please call 775-847-0954 or visit www.storeycountyfire.org

How often do smoke alarms need to be replaced?

Submitted

How often should the smoke alarms in your home be replaced? If you don't know, you're not alone. A national survey conducted by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) shows that nine out of 10 Americans don't know how often smoke alarms need to be replaced. The correct answer: every 10 years.

Some U.S. homes may have smoke alarms that have outlasted their full functionality, putting people at increased risk in the event of a home fire. NFPA statistics show that three out of five U.S. home fire deaths occur in homes with no smoke alarms or no working alarms.

Key Survey Findings:

- Half of Americans (50 percent) have three or more smoke alarms in their current home
 - Almost one in five Americans who have smoke alarms say the oldest smoke alarm they currently have in their home is 10+ years old
 - Nearly one in five Americans who have smoke alarms are not sure how old the oldest smoke alarm they currently have in their home is
 - When asked how often they should replace smoke alarms, nine in 10 Americans (90 percent) did not select the correct answer, which is once every 10 years
- "Working smoke alarms reduce the risk of dying in a home fire in half," said Carli. "That's why it's so important to make sure they're working properly."

A smoke alarm's age can be determined by looking on the back or side of the smoke alarm, where the date of manufacture can be found. Smoke alarms should be replaced 10 years from that date (not the date of purchase or installation). In addition, smoke alarms should be tested monthly, and batteries should be replaced when they begin to chirp, signaling that they're running low.

For more information on smoke alarms and this year's Fire Prevention Week campaign, visit www.firepreventionweek.org.

The Promise and Power of Journalism

By Barry Smith

Each year when Nevada newspapers gather for our convention and awards banquet, I'm struck by the seriousness of the issues they confronted in their communities.

It's easy to look away and ignore the difficulties we face, but that's not what journalists do. Instead, I see it as a sign of a vigorous community to examine what's wrong and explore ways to fix it.

That's called leadership, and it's part of why we celebrate National Newspaper Week (Oct. 2-8) — because of the fundamental First Amendment belief that the more we know and discuss freely, the stronger we are as a democracy.

Here are some examples of award-winning journalism from Nevada newspapers and magazines over the past year:

- In Las Vegas, reporter Colton Lochhead investigated abuses in the guardianship system that exposed the elderly and frail to being ripped off by the very people who were supposed to be protecting them. His series in the Las Vegas Review-Journal led to statewide reforms.
- In Elko, the reporters of the Elko Daily Free Press took an in-depth look at the difficulties faced by its transient population and efforts by the city to solve them in a series called "Homeless but not hopeless."
- In Reno, stories by Anjeanette Damon in the Reno Gazette-Journal about the squalid living conditions in group homes for developmentally disabled people — including wasted tax dollars, unqualified owners and lax regulations — brought about meaningful and immediate changes.
- In Carson City, Nevada Appeal reporter Taylor Pettaway tackled the pervasive problem of domestic violence, covering not only the effects on victims but also on their children and families.
- On a national level, writers and editors at Carson City-based RANGE magazine devoted extensive coverage to issues raised by the Grass March, a coast-to-coast ride protesting government overreach and unreasonable policies on federal lands. It was led by Grant Gerber, an Elko rancher who died from an accident in Kansas before he could return home.
- Honored by the Nevada Press Association as Story of the Year, Jackie Valley's series in the Las Vegas Sun dug deep into the struggles of families with children dealing with mental-health problems.

"As I read this series," wrote a member of the Arizona Newspapers Association, "and was introduced to multiple families struggling to keep children safe and healthy, I was reminded of a friend who is in a similar situation with her son, and I thought I should send her links to Jackie's articles to help her remember her family isn't alone in dealing with this."

These stories — and more, every day — are about real people in Nevada who deserve our attention. This is the promise and the power of journalism — to shed light into the darker corners of our lives, and to provide an opportunity for some comfort and resolution.

Barry Smith is executive director of the Nevada Press Association. For more about Nevada newspapers, go to nevadapress.com.

ANSWERS, continued from page 1

- "The type and structure of investigation would depend upon the issue at hand. The Storey County District Attorney's Office is oftentimes involved in administrative investigations and that office is involved in the case to which you refer."*

We were provided with a copy of Storey County Policy 1001: Disciplinary Actions and Appeals. The pertinent sections are contained below.

Justification for Discipline

Disciplinary action, up to and including termination, may be taken against an employee for unsatisfactory performance or for misconduct including, but not limited to the following:

 4. Unauthorized possession, removal or use of the employer's property including but not limited to, funds, records, keys, confidential information of any kind, equipment, supplies or any other materials.
 12. Willfully or intentionally violating or failing to comply with the employer's policies, rules, regulations and/or procedures.
- Forms of Disciplinary Action*

Disciplinary action includes, but is not limited to, one or more of the following: verbal warning, written reprimand, suspension, pay reduction, demotion and termination.

Bottom line: Leaks have occurred. Storey County states they take this seriously and are conducting a thorough investigation. Therefore, they are unable to discuss the matter in any detail at this time. If and when it is determined who is responsible, appropriate action will be taken, up to and including termination of employment.

Thank you to Austin Osborne and others in Storey County who helped to prepare responses to our questions. We appreciate the effort to keep the public properly informed. However, I'm left with one last question. How long does an investigation take? Assuming an investigation was initiated after the leak of the Black documents, how much longer do you think it will be until an outcome may be reached and when will those results be shared with the public?