



July 18, 2012

Dean Gray Out At Desert Star Weekly



Dean Gray, muckraker and self described watch dog over city government, is out at the newspaper he founded four years ago. Gray confirmed today by telephone he is no longer working for the Desert Star Weekly.

Gray said he was notified yesterday by the new owner of the Desert Star Weekly but said he had no hard feelings. Desert Star Weekly was struggling when Eddie Verdugo purchased the paper three months ago. Verdugo owns a chain of community weekly newspapers throughout California.

"I'm at the beach today with my family enjoying a much needed rest," said Gray. "Today we are going surfing." As we talked to Gray by phone we could hear excited sounds of his two boys badgering Gray, "When are we going surfing?" They wanted him to get off the phone.

Gray is no stranger to badgering. He was a thorn in the side of local city officials. Gray brought to public view what he considered big mistakes at city hall, particularly city hall in Desert Hot Springs.

Gray published with what some say is an overzealous keyboard. No doubt there are contingents at city hall that are celebrating Gray's departure from the Desert Star Weekly. That was not wind blowing this morning. It was the exhaling of a collective sigh of relief from city hall officials.

On the flip side, Gray developed a community following that landed him and his publication in the top 400,000 most popular websites worldwide and in the top 50,000 websites in U.S. popularity rankings according to Alexa. Those fans no doubt welcomed and read the light that Gray shined on city hall affairs - literally.

Gray continually billed Desert Star Weekly as an "alternative newspaper" following the model of the LA Free Press and other counter culture publication icons. In the four years he published Desert Star Weekly, Gray and his weekly newspaper chronicled what other more mainstream news outlets did not cover.

Desert Star Weekly under Gray is credited with exposing illegal dumping in the desert by a well connected local developer. The headline on the story screamed, "Toxic Dump Exposed." That story led to a clean up of a residential development, Paradise Springs, and the embarrassment of the local developer.

Gray also published an expose about a city purchase of a building that was found to be unsafe for occupancy and had to be torn down right after the city purchased it. Gray let the world know city hall failed to perform a structural inspection on the 50-year-old building prior to the \$1.4 million city purchase.

Desert Star Weekly is also credited with exposing a homeless shelter that was set up illegally in a Desert Hot Springs residential neighborhood. The headline, "Secret Homeless Shelter." Gray made it no secret. He let the world know it was Mayor Yvonne Parks that volunteered the building as a cold weather shelter and invited the rest of the Coachella Valley cities to bus their homeless to Desert Hot Springs each night. Residents were irate. Gray came to the rescue.

Gray for sure made his share of enemies at city hall. It is hard to say what public official despised him most but former Desert Hot Springs Councilman Karl Baker is at the top of the list.

"The feature we did to expose Baker's extravagant city spending on the taxpayer's dime was a biggie," said Gray. Through relentless public information requests Gray uncovered Baker staying at expensive hotels 50 miles away from the city and on the taxpayer's dime.



Karl Baker

Gray also caught Baker driving with an expired vehicle registration and published pictures of Baker standing along side his car talking to police officers. We are left wondering how it is that Gray was there at just the exact moment the police caught Baker with expired vehicle tags.

We asked Gray how he felt knowing there are some people in the city celebrating his departure from Desert Star Weekly and if he feels he lost.

"You don't solve problems in government by saying there are not problems and ignoring them. It is the traditional role of the press." said Gray. "I had four years in that role. That is not a loss. Most people have only an occasional letter to the editor."

Gray may have had four years as more than a letter writer but as we noted last week, four years of Gray's news stories are systematically being deleted from the internet pages of Desert Star Weekly. Gray is not the only thing gone from the paper.

We had one final question for Gray. With his obvious zeal for reporting about city hall, will he keep writing? "Right now I'm going surfing with my family," said Gray. "We'll talk about that when I get back from vacation."
