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The Commercial Record

Character assassin's tactics, background reveal much

To the editor,

I am writing in reference to the editorial "Why Saugatuck & Douglas Tax-payers Are Being Taken Down the Blue Star Trail to Nowhere & Why It's Time to Wake Up, Ask Questions and Demand Answers" which appeared in the April 13 issue of the Local Observer.

My first inclination after reading was to laugh it off as another one of Michael Gallagher's smear jobs, which have become common to his paper over the years. He fancies himself as a super-sleuth investigative reporter. But history reflects that his hit pieces often rely on "unnamed sources" or unknown persons who have "reportedly" told him things that he then repeats as fact in his articles, when in reality they are fabrications or lies.

Usually, it is just a matter of considering the source and moving on. However, his latest editorial contains lies about me personally and fabrications that unfairly reflect on my son Aaron, Saugatuck Township Manager.

Many area residents, especially newer ones, may not be aware of Mr. Gallagher's past history and therefore have no basis on which to judge the credibility or reputation of this man when comparing it to the character and reputation of those local citizens he has smeared. A man who thrives on destroying the reputations of others must be subject to the same scrutiny and exposure concerning his own "behind the scenes" activities and behavior.

The first lie in the above-mentioned editorial is that I, as "daddy Sheridan," was working behind the scenes with Aaron in some nefarious way to pull the strings necessary to get the Saugatuck City Council to approve the proposed bike trail. The truth is, because of my interest in the completion of the bike trail as an avid longtime cyclist, I wrote a letter expressing my support for the project to the Saugatuck Township Planning Commission chairman.

At my son's suggestion I copied it to the Saugatuck city manager and asked him to provide a copy to city council members. The members could take it or leave it. The letter is in the record and open to the public. There was no "behind the scenes" involved.

It is true, as reflected in Aaron's email, he suggested that I could call council members Mark Bekken, Barry Johnson and Jeff Spangler to express my support for the trail. The innuendo, intended from the editorial's writer, is that this is further evidence of my string pulling deviousness. Had Mr. Gallagher checked with any or all of these gentlemen, he would have found that I made no calls to any of them, at any time, about the trail.

Mr. Gallagher's second lie, however, is the more egregious to me, and unfair to Aaron. Gallagher writes:

"For example, Aaron Sheridan is pulling out all the stops and is working to get his daddy- former Allegan County judge Steve Sheridan - the same man who pulled the strings to get sonny boy his job with the township and who is known as a biking enthusiast- to pull some strings with his boys on the city council."

This utterly ridiculous and sophomoric statement contains two lies. It is completely false relative to Aaron's hiring as township manager. The truth is, Aaron worked a number of years in the township office, starting as an intern, then as an underpaid assistant to township manager Phill Quade. Aaron worked hard, learned the job, paid his dues and was hired by the township board at the recommendation of Mr. Quade upon his retirement.

I never once spoke to any township board member, Phil Quade or anyone else in any behind the scenes, string pulling endeavor to get Aaron hired. I was pleased that he got the job, but Aaron was totally qualified by education and experience to be hired, and was hired on his own merit.

This is an example of the kind of falsehood and fabrication this man employs when seeking to denigrate or disparage someone in his paper.

The second lie in his editorial is the statement that Mark Bekken, Barry Johnson and Jeff Spangler are "my (his) boys," again insinuating that I could get them to do my bidding. It must have come as a real shock to them to learn in the Observer that they were my "boys." I have known Mark and Barry for many years, but am hardly acquainted with Jeff Spangler. I do, however, know the character of these gentlemen and can say, unequivocally, none of them would be subject to my mythical "string pulling" powers.

For future reference, one may want to consider the past history of Local Observer Editor Michael Gallagher. I don't recall any expose appearing in his paper describing his own behind-the-scenes illegal activities. I would refer you to an article which can be found on the internet in a publication entitled the Reporters Committee. The truthfulness of this information is well documented in many other internet sources as well. It reads:

Reporter sentenced over Chiquita voicemail theft

OHIO - Former Cincinnati Enquirer reporter Michael Gallagher was sentenced to five years probation and 200 hours of community service in mid-July for illegally gaining access to the internal voice-mail system at Chiquita Brand's International banana company while researching an investigative series on the company's business practices, according to the Associated Press.

Gallagher had pleaded guilty to felony charges of unlawful interception of communications and unauthorized access to voice mail systems in October of 1998 in the Court of Common Pleas in Cincinnati. He faced a maximum sentence of two-and one half years in prison and fines of \$7,500. Gallagher pleaded guilty to the two felony charges as part of a settlement with prosecutors in which he agreed to cooperate with their investigation of the voice-mail theft and ultimately disclosed his confidential source- former Chiquita lawyer George Ventura.

It should be noted that other reports about this case, which can be found on the internet, state that the Cincinnati Enquirer was later sued by the Chiquita company and paid Chiquita \$14 million as result of Gallagher's illegalities.

According to an article appearing on the Wikipedia free encyclopedia internet site, shortly after Gallagher was fired by the Enquirer, he removed to Saugatuck, Mich., and become editor of the Observer Newspapers. It also states on July 20, 2012, Gallagher's criminal record was sealed (effectively expunged) in Hamilton County Pleas Court.

The fact that the record was sealed is a legal procedure open to convicted felons upon a showing to the court after a number of years that the individual has had no further convictions.

This does not alter the fact or the truth of Mr. Gallagher's multiple felony convictions.

I find it extremely distasteful to even write this letter. But a man's character, values, decency and honesty are the most important things he has in his lifetime when viewed by his fellow citizens, Mr. Gallagher may be entitled to forgiveness for his past transgressions. But, his history of impugning the character of others through lies, innuendos, fabrications and falsities can no longer be left unchallenged.

With freedom of the press comes great responsibility. To those who control and hold the power of the press, it is a responsibility to print the truth with as much accuracy and fairness as possible.

Unfortunately, Michael Gallagher, as Editor of the Local Observer, has failed this community in that regard.

For the record, I wish to state that my son, Aaron Sheridan, has no knowledge of this letter to the editor. I am sorry to say, it will undoubtedly expose him (and probably me) to further character assassinations in the future by Mr. Gallagher. That is regrettable, but sometimes one has to finally say "enough is enough."

Steve Sheridan - Saugatuck Township