

No Standing News

Since we have no standing, we stand with those left standing.

Volume I

Number 53

January 15, 2000

THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK!

We knew when we started No

Standing News it would happen.

We were all pretty sure we knew how it would happen and who would try it. But in our wildest dreams we didn't expect them to make us a gift of the evidence so we could use it to beat them over their pointy little heads.

The story began, without our knowledge, about nine months ago when Buz Harvey, Chairman of the Rolla Area Chamber of Commerce dropped in on Meg Brady, President of RollaNet. The purpose of his visit was to tell her that he wanted her to remove the NSN listing and link from the RollaNet home page index of news and information sources. RollaNet, like all net administrators reserves the right to terminate service to any subscriber who uses the system for illegal, abusive or offensive activities. Harvey's excuse for this backdoor attempt at censorship was his claim that NSN shouldn't be included in the directory unless they make NSN disclose who PHIL is and provide his address. Meg Brady, having noted the number of times the Rolla Daily News prints an editorial or news story with no attribution, did not agree and so she did not remove the NSN link.

RollaNet Gets Heat. Meg and the RollaNet Board of Directors are well aware of the range of First Amendment issues swirling around this new communications medium. Having checked the

NSN content before she set up the link, Brady was satisfied that although NSN might be political dynamite for Harvey and some local politicians, it fell far short of the criteria used by net administrators to exercise control over users. Despite Harvey's false claim that RollaNet is an electronic newspaper, and his not too subtle, innuendo that "it may be legally dangerous" for RollaNet to publish such information, Brady and the review board were not intimidated and they were not gullible enough to let RollaNet be used as Buz Harvey's tool.

A Threatened Boycott? But Buz didn't stop there. Buz Harvey seldom knows when to stop. We find that one of his most useful characteristics. His indiscretions as a Chamber officer have provided more material for NSN than anyone except the mayor.* Over the next nine months Harvey continued to demand, always in the name of the Chamber of Commerce, that Brady and the RollaNet board delete the NSN link. Finally, he told one of her co-workers that if she didn't comply with the Chamber demands **he would write about RollaNet in the Chamber newsletter and recommend that Chamber members disengage from RollaNet!** Even under threat of a Chamber boycott Brady still wouldn't budge because she believed that it wouldn't be ethical to do what he demanded. When RollaNet membership notices were sent out, Buz wrote back that he was withholding the Chamber payment to RollaNet until she "shared" her decision in writing. Brady still would not knuckle under. Recently odd things have started to happen. Meg Brady and other staff members are hearing from people that they were told by certain business firms that RollaNet isn't taking

new subscribers and they should arrange for Internet service from another provider! This misinformation was coming from three businesses in particular. All three are Chamber members. RollaNet has plenty of capacity for additional subscribers and has never said or hinted anything to the contrary. How did a baseless rumor suddenly pop up in so many places at the same time? Just a bizarre coincidence, or the beginning of the threatened boycott? If this is not just a 'spontaneous outbreak of curiously identical rumors', it would be wise if the rumor peddlers would stop to consider that this kind of dirty trick can cut both ways!

Unable to shake off the demands of Buz Harvey, last week Brady answered Harvey and gave a heads-up to NSN editor, Robert Nash. Brady is very concerned that continuing misinformation, or disinformation campaign if that is what it is, will have a damaging impact on the computer service. RollaNet is owned and operated by a non-profit board and is the *only internet service which makes computer terminals available in several locations in the county free of charge to those don't own computers or who can't afford to subscribe*. That makes RollaNet a very valuable public utility - like our public library. Nash wasn't surprised to hear the story but he was impressed that she had held out for so long under such pressure. NSN was prepared for attacks from certain quarters for daring to question rampant conflict of interest, mismanagement, illegality and deception in the city, and they haven't disappointed us. We expected to be attacked but we didn't anticipate that people we didn't even know would be punished in our stead!

For purposes of clarification RollaNet added the word "opinion" and the editor's name to the NSN listing but they didn't remove the link. Congratulations to the refreshingly fair-minded and ethical people at RollaNet! We can't help thinking that Brady and the RollaNet board have just joined a long and distinguished line of American librarians who have, throughout our

Public Library also maintains an NSN archive. That doesn't necessarily mean they agree with the content and ideas expressed, it only means that in this country there will be no banned books and no censorship of ideas and opinions by "Big Brothers" who want to control what others read and think. The RollaNet organization has proven they are worthy of the public trust, and deserve community support.

Who Is Next? How absurd to make such a monumental issue out of a small directory listing which few may even have noticed - until now. What did Harvey imagine he would accomplish if they had just removed the link - the simultaneous disappearance of NSN? Not a chance! NSN is also mailed to many people who don't have computers; will Buz harass the post office next? The fact that RollaNet has been subjected to pressure and intimidation for nearly a year is more than just distasteful - it is chilling. The only thing he has accomplished by throwing the Chamber's weight around is demonstrate that anyone who crosses Buz Harvey and the Chamber can expect the same shabby treatment. Is that the image they want? That anyone who has an honest difference of opinion with self-styled community 'leaders' does so at their own risk? How many other business people must now be wondering if, or when, some small transgression or personal opinion might subject them to the same coercion.

Shame on the Chamber Board! We would like to give the benefit of the doubt to the general Chamber membership (as opposed as Harvey is to referendums we're sure they were never consulted). We hope they would never approve of what he has done. But the Chamber board is another matter. Buz always made it clear that he was speaking "on behalf of the Chamber board". Were his tactics actually sanctioned by the Chamber board of directors, or has Harvey just used their name for his purposes without telling

history, resisted the book-burning impulses of self-appointed censors. In the same tradition the Rolla

them? Could they all have been totally unaware of what he was doing to RollaNet? If there was a board vote to boycott RollaNet by board members: **Steve Bowles, Terry Harris, Cathie Johns, Kim Haas, Ward Merrell, Gary Peters, Mohammed Qayoumi, Dennis Bennett, Fred Voss, Linda Hagler, Joe Coonrod and Dick Elgin;** they should heed Harvey's "warning" to RollaNet and look to their own legal liability. Steve Bowles, the new chairman, now has a mess to clean up. He should, at the very least, pay the bill and apologize - "on behalf of the Chamber Board."

The lengths to which Buz and the "Sell the Park to Appease the Chamber" crowd will go to silence opposition have exceeded the limits of decency. Not only have they discredited in advance anything they have to say regarding the park sale, but they have also tarnished the reputation of their organization. If anyone was undecided on the question of whether Buehler Park should be sold, this stunt should make up their minds.

Why have their tactics sunk so low? Because they aren't accustomed to being denied what they want and because they know they can't make a compelling case for selling a public park for no better reason than they want the city to provide a park around their Visitors' Center. When you have no defense, attack, attack, attack.

In her response below, Brady suggests that Harvey contact Nash directly instead of using RollaNet as a lever. We're not positive, but he may have already done that. Last spring someone made a phone call to Nash demanding to know who PHIL was. The caller refused to identify himself but Nash has caller ID. The anonymous call was made from The Chamber of Commerce office. We think that speaks for itself.

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<Harvey/Brady e-mail>

*Other Harvey articles and letters:

<<http://www.rollanet.org/~rwnash/nsn.html> > See Issues #1, 5 and 30.

***** E-mail from Buz Harvey "on behalf of the board of

directors of the Rolla Area Chamber Commerce" to Meg Brady. Original Message From: Buz Harvey [<mailto:bharvey@umr.edu>] Sent: Tuesday, August 31, 1999 6:25 PM To: megbrady@umr.edu Subject: No Standing News link on Rollanet homepage

Dear Meg:

More than 2 months ago, I wrote a letter to the Rollanet board on behalf of the board of directors of the Rolla Area Chamber Commerce concerning the unsigned, unattributed opinions contained within No Standing News. To some extent, the Rollanet serves as an electronic newspaper about this area, and I do not believe it is responsible - and it may be legally dangerous - to facilitate the distribution of such information when there is no attribution.

I asked the Rollanet board to consider simply asking the writers/contributors/editors of NSN to do what any self-respecting newspaper would ask them to do: put a legitimate name and address on each submission. Failing that, I asked - again on behalf of the Chamber board - that you consider removing their reference on the Rollanet homepage. I have yet to receive an answer and the reference is still there.

As an early and strong supporter of the Rollanet who believes that the Rollanet has contributed mightily to our favorable national - if not local-image, I'm asking you and the board to share your decision with the Chamber in writing. I may be reached here at the University at bharvey@umr.edu, by pager at 428-6037, at home at 364-3134 or t the

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University at 341-6951.

Please be assured I fully support and am deeply grateful for the existence of the Rollanet. But I do need an answer to our inquiry concerning the attribution issue in the No Standing News publication.

Thank you,

Buz Harvey
Chairman of the Board
Rolla Area Chamber of Commerce

Reply from the RollaNet board to Buz Harvey.

Delivered-To: rwnash@rollanet.org
From: "Brady, Meg " <megbrady@umr.edu>
To: "Buz Harvey" <bharvey@umr.edu> Cc: "review@rollanet.org" <review@rollanet.org>, <rwnash@rollanet.org>
Subject: RE: No Standing News link on Rollanet homepage
Date: Wed, 5 Jan 2000 11:44:53 -0600

Buz,

First, let me thank you and the Chamber for your support of RollaNet. I am proud of what RollaNet has accomplished for our community, providing a rich resource of information about this area of the world and the access to that information for everyone who visits.

Next, let me explain what action was taken in response to your request. Following a discussion among Rollanet Review Board members, the section containing the link to No Standing News (NSN) was re-labeled to include the word "Opinion" for clarification. The description for the NSN link itself now identifies Robert W. Nash as the editor of the page being linked. Generally, the Review Board felt this action was sufficient.

Contrary to your assertion that RollaNet is a newspaper or publisher, it is not. RollaNet is no more a "publisher" than is a public library or phone company.

I suggest you take your concerns regarding NSN to Mr. Nash. His email address is rwnash@rollanet.org.

Respectfully,

Meg Brady President,
RollaNet

Views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of No Standing News, nor of its Editor-in-Chief. -----

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-----Editors note: Copies of No Standing News can be obtained free from the Rolla Public Library who is a subscriber, and from Mail Boxes Etc Of Rolla Also visit our web site at: <http://www.rollanet.org/~rwnash/nsn.html>

I encourage distribution of " No Standing News ."Please feel free to copy and distribute any issue.