

HardisonInk.com

Fanning Springs mayor seems to be upset again; *Audio set for release tomorrow*

By Jeff M. Hardison © Aug. 10, 2016 @ 5:27 p.m.

FANNING SPRINGS – The hubbub and folderol that shook City Hall in Fanning Springs on Tuesday evening (Aug. 9) was enough to light up the telephone company’s switchboards across the Tri-County Area of Levy, Dixie and Gilchrist counties as the mayor appears to have made a major gaffe.

It might be tagged by thinking individuals as the faux pas of the week. Human resource scholars see it as an example of what not to do, because generally public sector employer-employee (non-agenda) issues are not discussed without any warning in front of an audience of people.

According to people who were at the regular monthly meeting of the Fanning Springs City Council, Mayor Howell E. “Trip” Lancaster III called Fanning Springs Acting Fire Chief Elania Spain on the carpet – literally, on the carpet of the meeting room in City Hall, in front of the sitting audience of bystanders.

The first-term mayor criticized Chief Spain for calling Ronnie McQueen, a current volunteer firefighter with Fanning Springs who is known for decades of service to that department prior to being suspended by Mayor Lancaster, “chief” during a private annual awards banquet held in Dixie County. Lancaster has interpreted a revised Florida law to mean that Chief McQueen cannot serve in his capacity as fire chief because he is a Firefighter I and not a Firefighter II.

A hearing officer has heard from lawyers on both sides of that argument, and a recommendation on whether to continue Lancaster’s ruling or to overturn it will be presented to the Fanning Springs City Council.

A majority of that five-member group can accept or reject the hearing officer’s recommendation.

A recording of the Tuesday meeting is scheduled for release to HardisonInk.com tomorrow (Aug. 11).

Two members of Fanning Springs City Council were able to be contacted on Wednesday, and they provided their perspectives on what sounds like a spectacle made by the mayor.

Fanning Springs City Council Chairman Paul Chase said Mayor Lancaster asked Spain if the article he had printed from HardisonInk.com was accurate. She confirmed that it was an accurate article.

The mayor seems to have had a problem with the part of the story where Spain was telling everyone at the private banquet how Chief McQueen had earned the title of “Chief” and would hold that distinctive label forever.

Past presidents, sheriffs, mayors, judges and others are still called by those titles out of respect for what those people did to earn those titles of leadership when they were active in their roles.

Members of the audience spoke highly of Fanning Springs Fire Rescue Department on Tuesday evening, Chairman Chase said.

Chase said that on Tuesday evening, Rodger Nogaki, husband of Fanning Springs City Councilwoman Jane Nogaki, said that he is still called “chief” when he returns to New Jersey, where he had that title and responsibility years ago.

When members of the audience asked to hear what was in the article, Chase said, Spain read it out loud. The audience applauded after hearing the article, Chase said.

At one point, Lancaster told City Clerk Sheila Watson to put the story in Spain’s personnel file.

“I think the mayor was a bit of an embarrassment to the city of Fanning Springs,” Chase said.

Fanning Springs City Councilman Ron Queen made an even stronger statement about the

HardisonInk.com

scene the mayor brought into being by attempting to criticize the acting chief for something she said at an annual banquet that has been covered for six years by HardisonInk.com, and by Jeff M. Hardison for a weekly tabloid in the area years before that.

“It was a total embarrassment for the city’s administration,” Queen said. “I have never seen someone try so hard to humiliate a member of the volunteer fire department. I have the utmost respect for all of the volunteer firefighters. What the mayor did was totally unprofessional.”

Chief Spain remains as the acting chief of Fanning Springs Fire Rescue.

On Wednesday afternoon, she shared her feelings about the scene from the night before.

“I will continue to do my job,” Spain said, “and represent Fanning Springs Fire Rescue with dignity, honesty, dedication and integrity.”

Contacted about the matter, Mayor Lancaster on Wednesday afternoon said he just asked Spain if the article was accurate. She said it was, he added.

That is it, Lancaster said. He just wanted to ask her if the article was accurate.

When he was asked if his command for Clerk Watson to place the article in Spain’s personnel file was by way of a commendation for the acting chief, the mayor said he had no other comment to make about personnel matters at this time.

The story (above) will be updated tomorrow after the audio recording is released.

Click [HERE](#) to see the previously published story and photos in regard to the annual banquet: