

# HardisonInk.com

---

## **Audience applauds speech for Fanning Springs volunteer firefighters;**

*Audio public record finally obtained from city of Fanning Springs after fluke event delays it by three days*



**Goldy the cat Hardison prepares to take a catnap in a new place after leaving the keyboard area late Monday afternoon (Aug. 15). The senior mascot of *HardisonInk.com* moved off of the keyboard after a tape was needed to be played over loudspeakers so that people could hear part of a Fanning Springs City Council meeting.**

### **Story, Photo and Video**

**By Jeff M. Hardison © Aug. 15, 2016 @ 7:07 p.m.**

**FANNING SPRINGS** – After a few visits to Fanning Springs City Hall, a tape-recording worked on Monday (Aug. 15) so that the Tuesday night (Aug. 9) meeting could be heard.

This successful session overcame a fluke event that resulted from a previous public records request – that went awry.

City Clerk Sheila Watson said she had never heard of recording disks performing as the two (700 megabyte rewritable) CDs bought by *HardisonInk.com* for \$5 had performed last week.

Those two CDs showed audio as if parts of the meeting were copied and pasted in incorrect order, rather than the chronological manner in which the meeting happened.

"I never had experienced something like this before either," *HardisonInk.com* publisher Jeff M. Hardison said in regard to the strange results of a meeting tape. "I am glad to have revisited Fanning Springs City Hall to hear the recorded version of the meeting. I am glad that version was not scrambled like the copy I bought."

Administrative Assistant Debbie Watson, the daughter-in-law of City Clerk Sheila Watson, helped the journalist on Monday morning (Aug. 15) listen to an audio record of the Aug. 9 meeting.

That audio showed members of the audience applauding when Fanning Springs Acting Fire

# HardisonInk.com

---

Chief Elania Spain read part of a story from *HardisonInk.com*.

And the people applauded again after Roger Nogaki spoke about how Fanning Springs Mayor Howell E. "Trip" Lancaster III should be thanking volunteer firefighters rather than threatening to put a paper copy of a story that was published in Spain's employment record.

Listening to what was said at the meeting shows Mayor Lancaster attempting to bully the acting fire chief for saying something that the mayor appears to not like, despite that statement by Chief Spain being made in Dixie County on private property during an annual private event the fire department has been having for many, many years before the mayor took his post.

Beyond the mayor attempting to use his taxpayer-funded public post to silence a person from making a complementary statement about Chief Ron McQueen, a man who has dedicated his life to saving the lives and property of thousands of people, Lancaster also, according to what can be heard from that meeting, appears to have violated a rule understood by most human resource officers.

As a supervisor, Lancaster actually chastised a subordinate in front of people, and he even orchestrated the public criticism with no advance notice to the employee or to anyone else.

The first-term mayor criticized Chief Spain for calling McQueen "chief" during the private annual awards banquet held in Dixie County. The city of Fanning Springs is partly in Levy County and partly in Gilchrist County, but no part of that city is in Dixie County.

This event is referred to during the City Council meeting as "the Summer Splash." It is a daylong bunch of fun for volunteer firefighters and their families, and it has traditionally ended with spoof awards being given.

The mayor suspended Chief McQueen from duty after the mayor decided the chief lacked the credentials to be a chief.

Fanning Springs Mayor Lancaster has interpreted a revised Florida law to mean that Chief McQueen cannot serve in his capacity as fire chief because Chief McQueen is a Firefighter I and not a Firefighter II. Other fire chiefs at volunteer departments across rural Florida may be adversely affected if Mayor Lancaster's ruling holds.

And property taxes and special fire assessments are anticipated to increase if those volunteer department chiefs need to be replaced by Firefighter II certified chiefs.

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 (Aug. 9) had been scheduled for release to *HardisonInk.com* on Aug. 11 and it was picked up. The two disks, however, that were provided are a convoluted mish-mash of the meeting – and disc "1 of 2" includes several minutes of recording from where the mayor, attorney and City Council members sit – before the meeting starts.

It was a pre-meeting tape such as that which led the state to charge a few City Council members with violating the Sunshine Law.

As for the Florida law that makes it a felony to tape-record people without their knowing it – such as the several minutes before every Fanning Springs City Council meeting – there must not be an expectation of privacy for people at the front of the meeting room of Fanning Springs City Hall just before a meeting starts.

Apparently that is a zone where it is fair game to tape without telling anyone up at that desk that a recording has started. Among the items taped on Aug. 9 was a discussion about a man's medical condition.

Meanwhile, though, there can be no discussion between voting members about matters upon which they may vote – except at properly advertised public meetings.

As for the mayor "putting the story in Spain's file," the mayor seems to have had a problem

# HardisonInk.com

---

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.

When members of the audience asked to hear what was in the article, Spain read part of it out loud. The audience applauded after hearing the part of the article where she explained why Chief McQueen will always be known as Chief McQueen, although the funny award that night was to the volunteer firefighter formerly known as Chief McQueen.

Chief Spain remains as the acting chief of Fanning Springs Fire Rescue. No date has been announced for the hearing officer to present his recommendation to the Fanning Springs City Council, however, it may be as soon as the next monthly meeting – which is set to start at 5 p.m. on Sept. 13 in Fanning Springs City Hall.

Click [HERE](#) to see the story where Chief Ron McQueen was noted to deserve the title "Chief" regardless of anything else.