

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
March 9, 2015
5:30 P.M.
2nd Floor County Committee Room
Governmental Center, Traverse City, MI 49684
Posted: 3/5/15

Information and minutes are available from the Human Resources Office, Governmental Center, 400 Boardman, Traverse City, MI 49684 922-4481. TDD: 922-4412. If you are planning to attend and you have a disability requiring any special assistance at the meeting, please notify the Assistant City Manager, by noon of the above meeting date.

AGENDA

- 1. ROLL CALL**
- 2. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE FEBRUARY 9, 2015 REGULAR MEETING**
- 3. PUBLIC COMMENT**
- 4. OLD BUSINESS**
 - a. Discussion regarding the Spring Educational Forum
 - b. Discussion Sara Hardy Award Celebration
 - c. Logo for HRC
- 5. NEW BUSINESS**
 - a. Traverse City Homeless Population
- 6. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS**
- 7. ADJOURNMENT**

Next regular meeting date: April 13, 2015 @ 5:30 p.m.
Agenda Items (w/back up material) and Committee Chair Reports MUST BE submitted to Ex Officio, Jamie Caroffino (jcaroffino@traversecitymi.gov) no later than noon, Wednesday, April 8, 2015. Commissioner Packets to be emailed April 10, 2015.

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**MINUTES
TRAVERSE CITY HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2014
5:30 P.M.
County Committee Room
Governmental Center, 2nd Floor
400 Boardman Avenue
Traverse City, Michigan 49684**

PRESENT: Commissioners Gardner, Hornberger, Johnson, McClellan, Mentzer,
Nash, Nerone, Nugent and Stinnet
STAFF PRESENT: Cindy Laurell

1. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE JANUARY 12, 2015 REGULAR MEETING

Motion was made to approve the January 12, 2015 meeting minutes. Upon vote, motion carried 9-0.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

3. OLD BUSINESS

a. Discussion regarding the Spring Educational Forum.

The forum will be held in the Governmental Center Training Room on the second floor on April 23, 2015 from 6:00pm – 7:30pm. The panel will consist of: Melissa Claramunt, American Indian specialist of Michigan Department of Civil Rights; Wendy Trute, Grand Traverse Health Department, and Michelle Shane. Medical waivers and the process will be discussed by the panel.

Discussion.

b. Discussion regarding the adoption of a Resolution in support of Indigenous Peoples Day.

Discussion.

c. Discussion regarding the MLK Day Celebration.

Discussion.

d. Discussion regarding the Sara Hardy Award Celebration.

Motion by Commissioner Gardner, seconded by Commissioner Mentzer to award the Sara Hardy to Glenda and Ken Andrews. Upon vote, motion carried 9-0.

Discussion.

4. NEW BUSINESS

a. Traverse City Homeless Population

Awaiting further clarification. Motion by Commissioner Gardner, seconded by Commissioner Nash to table agenda item until next meeting. Upon vote, motion carried 9-0.

5. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

a. Commissioner Stinnet

Commissioner Stinnet will explore the option of having the commission create their own logo.

6. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 6:30 p.m.

Cindy Laurell, Acting Secretary

Date

12/4/14

Shock Jocks Bully TC Homeless?

Currently, the most talked about subculture in Traverse City is our ever-growing homeless population. During this past summer, there was much ado concerning the new Safe Harbor homeless shelter and the recent opening of Dann's House (our new local wet house). There was a flurry of conversation; town hall meetings, newspaper articles and more.

During the first week of July, Steve Normandin and Rick Coates, the disc jockeys on the WKLT morning show "Omelette and Friends", took an opinionated stance against Safe Harbor, Dann's House and the city officials who support the initiatives. WKLT (97.5 F.M.) and WKLZ (98.9 F.M.) are rock stations simulcasting as "KLT The Rock Station" and command a huge following in this part of Michigan. The stations are not only broadcast in Traverse City, Kalkaska and Petoskey, but can "be heard as far north as Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, as far west as Manistique, and as far south as Lake City."

In past years, Omelette and Finster, (the DJ who worked with Normandin at the time), were known to use homeless people to entertain, not only their audiences, but also themselves. On the morning of Aug. 6, the two hosts complained that city officials had accused them of "being mean to homeless people" in connection with their coverage of Safe Harbor and Dann's house. Both hosts made derogatory comments toward the wet house, and against homeless citizens, in general.

On Aug. 6, one of the DJs made the comment, "Give more alcohol to the drunks," which was directed toward the city, concerning the wet house. They followed with, "We aren't mean to homeless people"... (pause)... "We donate money to the Cherryland Humane Society." Omelette and Friends seemingly tried to justify their statements with, "We are a rock station. We're just tryin' to have fun.



One of the hosts then declared, in reference to our homeless residents, "We don't go to them. They come to us." The two morning show hosts are correct when they say that homeless people come to them. Homeless people flock to the morning show hosts for numerous reasons. Some come in order to attend WKLT's Camp Omelette where the hosts and homeless go camping together almost every year and share alcohol around a campfire while listening to music, among other activities. However, many more homeless citizens seek them out, in spite of the social injustices they must endure, in order to get on-the-job training, to be considered "cool" and get to hang out with the hosts, or maybe just to be able to speak on the radio and have that brief moment of fame.

One of Omelette's favorite homeless people to exploit was a man who went by the name of Tuna while on the Morning show several years ago. Tuna was, and still is, a Community Mental Health patient who is considered to be permanently mentally

disabled and is on Social Security specifically for those problems. Often, he is more child-like than adult, and had only one huge dream: that of one day becoming a DJ himself.

On the morning of Aug. 6, the comment was also made, while speaking about Tuna, the former homeless citizen whom Omelette had allegedly befriended and trained to be a disc jockey for WKLT. "So what...we made Tuna go through a car wash. He smelled and needed a bath (laughter)." The fact that Tuna was coerced by Omelette and Finster into going through that car wash in the middle of February in the back of a pickup truck was not mentioned. The same year on Valentine's Day he was sent out by his "employers" dressed like Cupid, to run around town wearing a diaper, tights and tennis shoes, banging on doors, waking up strangers in the early morning hours, and getting chewed out...all the while on the air, with Omelette and Finster laughing in the background.

During one of the morning show hosts' 'fun' moments, Tuna was duct-taped to a tree while people threw eggs at him. They talked him into letting them make a CD of him singing Christmas carols. They sold them for \$10 each and donated the proceeds to A.C. Paws. Since Tuna is tone deaf, it seemed cruel. At one time, Omelette told him that he was too fat to be a DJ and made him go on a diet. Then he made Tuna wear a Speedo, took a photograph of him wearing it, and put it on the WKLT website.

At the time, Omelette told Tuna that these stunts were part of a process called "hazing"...that most people have to go through it in order to become a DJ, including Omelette himself. Tuna never did realize his dream and become a DJ, although he was given a job as a board operator at WKLT and paid minimum wage.

During a personal interview on Oct. 8, Tuna claimed that the Speedo episode was "the worst thing they did to me" and that he was "really embarrassed." When asked how Omelette and Finster made him feel, he replied, "They really made me feel bad about myself." Tuna was not alone. Other homeless people have been treated in the same manner in recent years, including one who was convinced to shave his head. Some homeless people were bullied into doing things for the morning show that could strip even the strongest human beings of self-esteem.

In late August, one of the morning show hosts recorded a clip of one woman calling in and complaining about how she didn't appreciate Omelette and friends making fun of homeless people, adding that she and her son had once been homeless. The radio show host then replied, "We don't make fun of homeless people"...followed by silence, and then, "How many homeless people does it take to screw in a light bulb? None, because they have nowhere to put it"...laughter. That clip was then played repeatedly as a commercial between sets of music.

More recently, in early October, one of the gentlemen from Dann's House called the Morning Show. The conversation turned to Halloween, and the caller was asked what they were doing at the wet house for Halloween. The caller communicated that he was excited about trick-or-treaters coming to the house. One of the DJs then asked him, "What are you guys handing out for treats to the trick-or-treaters...Natty Daddys?" A Natty Daddy is a particularly cheap and foul-tasting can of beer that alcoholics sometimes drink because of the low cost and high alcohol content.

During a telephone interview on October 14, Omelette was asked about the homeless joke that was aired as part of the morning show and he replied, "We felt like we were being attacked. We were defending ourselves against something about the wet house. Rick came up with the joke, and we ran it." He also said, "I don't believe we are mean to homeless people. We bring them to the show. We make them a part of the family. We give them small jobs and help them." Omelette asserted that the Morning Show hosts have "done a lot of good things for The Goodwill Inn, Salvation Army and other charities." In late October, the DJs helped with The Sleep Out fundraiser, which raises money for heating assistance. Omelette added about the topic of homelessness, "We're doing more than anybody...at least on the local radio, and I don't see the local news people going out of their way. Of course, everybody is doing charity."

When asked about the treatment of Tuna, Omelette replied, "While society was pushing him away, we were bringing him in. I went through it as an intern. Certain personalities lend themselves to stunt radio. I can understand how some people could think it was in bad taste." There is a video of Tuna going through the carwash on YouTube called "WKLT Fresh Water Tuna" The look on Tuna's face and the way he was treated during the carwash speaks volumes about how upset he was while participating in so-called stunt radio.

However, Omelette insists, "It isn't anything I haven't done myself." He goes on to say, "Even recently, I ran down Front Street in the middle of the winter when the Lions were 0 and 16. I said, 'If they don't win a certain number of games, I'm gonna run down Front Street live on the air, and I think it was January and I ran down the street in my underwear. I was paying a bet off. It was funny. I put myself out there.'"

Omelette then explained that they have certain characters that they refer to as their "Misfits". He said, "It is a show of characters. We call certain people misfits, kind of like the Island of Misfit Toys in Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer, whether they are homeless or not. It is an endearing term." He said that during the BP oil spill, Sideshow-Nate, a guy considered one of their Misfits, "covered himself in used motor oil and stood outside on the road in his underwear." Omelette laughingly admitted that they also had Sideshow-Nate "dress up as Osama Bin Laden and walk down the street." He then declared, "We ended that real quick because we thought he might get shot." He talked about another so-called Misfit named Mr. Windy, who is very popular on the Morning Show, claiming, "We provide beer for him and then he gets a little buzz on and is funny on the show."

When asked about homeless jokes, Omelette explained, "Comedy is always making fun of something. Tragedy plus time is the formula for comedy. This goes back to Charlie Chaplin. He said, 'A joke that I always say is that number one they (homeless people) are available. They don't have to go into work, and they can come into the show.'" He went on to say that WKLT is "doing a show on a limited budget" and that "these people are available and they'll work for a breakfast sandwich and a cup of coffee." He claims that the radio station "needs help answering phones and doing other stuff."

When asked if he realizes that the DJs are role models to many teenagers, Omelette said, "If we are going to be looked at as public figures, then let's talk about our actions. We really embrace the community with our actions and we want them to know that." He admits that they do have teenage listeners, but insists, "We tell parents all the time that the show is only for age 13 and above."

The morning show hosts reject the notion that they are mean to homeless people. Omelette believes that their charitable actions make up for their words and dark humor concerning homeless people while on the air. Actions are extremely important. However, one can only achieve credibility when words match actions.

With all the recent buzz about the new Safe Harbor shelter and Dann's House, I have tuned in to the morning show with Omelette and Friends as often as possible to keep track of how they treat our homeless population. Their comments never fail to shock and sadden me. Let's face it...any form of media is powerful, and homeless people are powerless...there is such an enormous imbalance. Power always comes with responsibility, and in this case it should be to the community in which it was broadcast.

Many teens and pre-teens of the next generation love rock'n roll and look up to the DJs at WKLT as role models. According to Ryan Hannon, director of Safe Harbor, "some teens were throwing stones at homeless people this past summer." Perhaps, role-modeling love, kindness and humanity to the future guardians of our city would be more appropriate. We all want to have fun — just not at the expense of others. Since when did it become okay to dehumanize homeless people and so carelessly eviscerate their self-esteem? Is this really just "trying to have fun?"

A little empathy and compassion from the local WKLT Morning Show hosts could impact many. Perhaps they should rise above their unkindness, and maybe even uplift our beautiful homeless citizens. Like the rest of us, homeless people may be flawed, but are surely just as human.

C.J. Haney

Guest Writer

14 Comments

3 days ago, 11:13 am | by VinceHancock

"I went through it as an intern."

"We really embrace the community with our actions and we want them to know that.%u201D

BDSM can turn up in any industry. Maybe it's more prevalent in radio. It seems to happen when a career or a gig is seen to be an exalted position, even if the fruits of that labor have spoiled in public view.

Vince Hancock
Former radio guy
Bear Lake, MI

2 days ago, 05:23 pm | by Anne

Shame on traverse city...thought you had more class

2 days ago, 07:42 pm | by Human Being

Great reporting! I've heard the buzz on the street about these two stooges for a long time. Treating others (homeless or not) as sub-human is the worst form of bullying. Make no mistake -- this isn't in "good fun." It's mean spirited and a lame attempt for these two to try to justify their own sad existence.

2 days ago, 10:22 pm | by jandt69

When KLT fired long time DJ's at the station about 5 years ago and replaced them with new "talent" I didn't like it but gave it chance. I listened for about two weeks and couldn't listen to the trash on the air anymore. Then they brought in Finster. Both DJ's came from the New England area. Within a month they were calling themselves locals to Northwestern Michigan and treating callers badly. I stopped listening to the morning show completely. It was sickening. Yet they managed to get written up in GQ magazine as the new breed of shock jock. In my opinion Jerks and not what Northern Michigan is. After a couple years Finster was fired for going to far. He was out of work for a year, married a local girl and "grew up" That is missing in this article. He did a lot of bad things and regrets it. He was hired by a new local station 2 years ago and I gave him a chance. I love the morning show he is on now. He is respectful of the people he meets and talks to and has fun with a media legend in Northern Michigan Vic McCarty, While, as his original name was stated "I'm lit" that is now called Omlet and Ric Coates still degrade and bash the people of Northern Michigan. They are a terrible representation of Northern Michigan and I don't know how they are still on the air.

2 days ago, 12:19 am | by huh?

Shame on Traverse City??? Get real. This article describes a couple of radio personalities employed by a radio station which draws funding through the sale of advertising. And you'll shame the whole town for what they say? That's narrow minded. What's worse is the backlash here. If you don't like it, then don't listen. It's that simple. Right, wrong or indifferent, there's no denying that the same freedoms being enjoyed by these two radio characters are the same ones this paper enjoys when it pukes up conjecture such as this. All of this "hurt feelings" crap is just that...a bunch of crap. If you have never heard questionable or dirty entertainment before then you just might live under a rock.

2 days ago, 08:00 am | by whatbs!

You forgot to mention that "Tuna" is in jail for supplying prescription drugs to a man and the drugs ended up killing him!!!! This is such a load of crap!! As for Kamp Omelette.....camping with the homeless????? Where do you get off thinking that is what is happening? It is a weekend camping trip which people come from all over to enjoy! Omelette has a big heart and does a lot of good for our community. Just recently they found out about a couple that was sleeping in their car and got them a place to stay for the night. Side Show Nate was a paid employee not an intern and definitely not homeless!! Mr. Windy was a friend of Omelette's. Get your facts straight before slandering the # 1 morning show in northern Michigan!!

If you call the morning show in need of help, they will do all they can to help you. Chew on that!

2 days ago, 09:09 am | by chilton

I find this very disturbing. I will not be listening to KLT.

2 days ago, 09:34 am | by whatbs!

They are addressing this now on WKLT. Tune in 97.5 or 98.9 or KLT radio app. This article is such BS! I am listening!

2 days ago, 10:12 am | by waterfront

So, if you pay money out you can denigrate a class of people all you want? Why exactly do you want to do both? Do you think that the

guests in GWI's dining room listening to themselves being trashed by KLT appreciate that this station pays money out to Goodwill while simultaneously bashing the people they purport to help? I'm telling you, you can hear a pin drop in there when they start their homeless bashing and then someone usually just walks over and changes the channel...that's not exactly helping.

Yes Tuna's incarcerated; he made bad decisions with tragic results...he's also mentally ill and was exploited...he needed people to help him make sound decisions, not take advantage of his condition.

Some in this town do a lot to the homeless because they think they can get away with it. The Whiting wont take anyone that applies with a GWI address and GWI comes right out and tells their guests not to use their address; Shadowland kicked out homeless people (paying customers) to turn their motel into the hawk's nest; GT Motel lets nightlys get trashed and smoke next to their rooms all night long but forces weeklys off the property to smoke...it's like getting told to use a different drinking fountain...people with housing vouchers get told no because its understood that they're otherwise homeless ...and the homeless get more than rocks thrown at them, they get flat out assaulted, usually by groups.

This attitude comes from somewhere and if KLT wanted to help they should ask themselves if they are helping to promote an anti-homeless agenda and how does that factor into the couple sleeping in their car...do they have more problems or less based upon KLT's treatment of the homeless on their show?

Yeah free speech and all...but why do they want to hurt the people they intend to help? (FWIW, I thought the Natty Daddy thing was funny, maybe I shouldn't have...)

1 days ago, 04:40 pm | by WKLTSUPPORTER

If you are so disgusted with them then why don't you go on air with them and tell them? Defend your article and let them defend their statements.

I listen to them regularly and not once have thought they were degrading the homeless population. They may not be PG but they are good guys.

If you are going to write such a BS story at least have the courtesy to own up to your article and confront them in person on air.

I don't believe a word of this article and will continue to listen to WKLT.

1 days ago, 07:04 pm | by Seriously

This is the most ridiculous article I have ever read! All you are doing is twisting everything to make it look bad. I will no longer waste my time reading any articles from White Pine Press.

1 days ago, 12:29 am | by Rugrat

I am a college student at NMC and also in a class where the Professor talked about WKLT in the mindset of the article. I am very upset that the college of all places, the ones who supposedly teach us further learning, would display UNTRUTHFUL statements. Shame on White Pine Press and the Author C. J. Haney for placing the wrong parts of the issue out there.

31 hours ago, 09:33 am | by edifacewrecks

%u201CWe tell parents all the time that the show is only for age 13 and above.%u201D Fascinating. What I've taken away from enduring hearing these boneheads is that it appears more likely that they are aiming for the 6 to 12 year old boy audience.

2 minutes ago, 04:35 pm | by TCgirl

I cannot believe I just wasted my time reading this article. What garbage!

I shake my head once again at the incredibly ignorant people in this country. It is really quite embarrassing.

KLT keep doing what your doing! I think its great you guys have the balls to call people out on things. Your an asset to the community, don't forget it.

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LOCAL HEADLINES UNFAIRLY REPRESENT HOMELESS AS CRIMINALS

OPINION
BY CHRISTIE MINERVINI

The recent debate over a proposed emergency homeless shelter in Traverse City has magnified long-held prejudices and bigotry against those who are unhoused. And why not? With local headlines like "Homeless man found guilty of attempted rape," "Police arrest homeless man for domestic violence," and "Homeless man charged in knife assault," we are being conditioned to fear and scorn those experiencing homelessness.

The media simply isn't fair when it publishes stories identifying the homeless as perpetrators in a crime. According to well-established journalism ethics and standards, the "limitation of harm" principle dictates the withholding of certain details from reports such as the names of minor children, crime victims' names, information not materially related to a news report or which may, for example, "hurt someone's reputation." This also includes showing good taste and avoiding pandering to lurid curiosity.

Imagine headlines like, "Christian woman charged with assault," "Canadian man arrested for rape," or "Lesbian guilty of attempted murder." These examples are obviously ridiculous, but illustrate the way the unhoused are often singled out.

It is irresponsible to include someone's housing status as part of a crime-related story, especially when it is of absolutely no relevance. It is no more important than knowing a suspect's race, religion, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, gender identity or disability (all protected classes). In fact, police departments do not include an individual's housing status in their incident reports.

Here's why this is especially egregious: people experiencing homelessness actually commit fewer violent crimes than housed people. A study by Dr. Pamela Fischer of Johns Hopkins University showed that while the homeless are slightly more likely to commit non-violent and non-destructive crimes (usually related to their survival), they are less likely to commit crimes against person or property.

Traverse City Police Chief Michael Warren echoed these observations in a memo to City Commissioners last fall: "(T)he majority of homeless persons do not utilize emergency services. The only exception is to go to the hospital because of health issues. And (we) have noticed a significant drop in dispatched calls... involving drunk and disorderly, trespassing and squad assists since the opening of Dann's House [a permanent housing facility for chronic alcoholic, homeless individuals]."

The National Health Care for the Homeless Council found that not only are the homeless less likely to commit a felony, they are 25 times more likely to be the victim of a violent crime. Their recent survey showed that 49

percent of homeless individuals report being victims of violence, versus 2 percent of the general population.

One possible explanation for this is that criminalizing homelessness sends a general message: "Homeless people do not matter and are not worthy of living in our city." Another Traverse City headline: "City wants homeless out." This message reflects the attitudes that many cities have toward people experiencing homelessness and can be used as an internal justification for attacking someone.

Legislators are beginning to take notice of this inequity. A bill was introduced last year by Congresswoman Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-Dallas) that would add the homeless or a person of "homeless status" as a protected class — shielding them from hate crimes or conspiracies to commit a hate crime.

This legislation is long overdue, considering that homeless are three times more likely to be victims of hate than all other protected classes combined. California State University, San Bernardino compared their research against FBI statistics over the past 15 years and found that there were 375 fatal attacks on homeless attributed to hate, when all of the other protected classes accounted for only 132.

The Violence Against the Homeless Accountability Act of 2013 (H.R. 1136) is currently in subcommittee. It is my sincere hope that passing this law will not only include the homeless among the protected classes, but that it will be applied to media coverage of the homeless as well. Based upon my understanding of the press, I realize that this is a pie-in-the-sky idea.

After President Obama signed the Federal Hate Crimes Bill into law in 2009, several conservative groups had concerns that it could be used to criminalize speech. But at the time, Attorney General Eric Holder said that it could only be used to prosecute violent acts based on bias, not to prosecute speech based on controversial beliefs.

That leaves the press in a self-governing position — they can choose whether or not to apply journalistic ethics and standards with little or no consequence.

Until we recognize that the media plays a very important roll in shaping perception and creating bias, and that we, as consumers, are responsible for holding them to fair journalistic standards, we will continue to read headlines like "Homeless man pleads guilty." It sells newspapers.

Christie Minervini owns Gallery Fifty at The Village at Grand Traverse Commons, and is active in causes of education and homelessness in the Grand Traverse region.