



Chatter : You Gotta Know When to Fold 'Em : Accused art thief turns down plea deal. Kenny Rogers may be involved.

Articles / News & Opinion

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WHEN WE LAST LEFT artist Norb Ziebold, he was facing theft charges and possible prison time for allegedly swiping his own painting ("Suffering for Art," Aug. 24). The whole thing stemmed from a falling-out with a friend.

Ziebold speculates that the former friend was behind a plea bargain offered last week: In exchange for copping to a misdemeanor, he'd get probation and drug and alcohol counseling. Ziebold turned it down. He's banking that a jury will see it his way: that he'd lent the painting to his friend, and that it's preposterous that he could be accused of stealing it back.



ZIEBOLD

We just dropped in to see what condition his condition was in.

But it's not clear how seriously Ziebold is taking it. After answering questions about his case, he explains the real reason he called.

"I was wondering, before Kenny Rogers went solo, what band was he in?" he asks. Apparently a coffeehouse bet hangs in the balance.

A quick Internet search turns up Kenny Rogers & the First Edition.

"*****. I'm screwed," Ziebold says. "I thought it was the Fifth Dimension."

— Amy Starnes

LONG LIVE JOE ... As candidates for the Ward 1 City Council seat introduced themselves to voters at a forum last week, disgraced former Councilman Joe Jones was never far from anyone's mind. Or from the stage, for that matter.

Jones resigned from Council in August, days after pleading guilty to mail fraud (and just a few months after attempting the novel defense that he was far too ineffective to be corrupt). But to Jones and many of the ward residents in attendance, that was a long, long time ago. And if the candidates hoping to succeed Jones thought the event was about them, they were sadly mistaken.

When candidate Rita Locke Calhoun said that the ward needed more snow-plowing and grass-cutting services, an audience member stood up to say that Joe Jones had provided more than enough.

Nina Turner was taken to task for having picketed against Jones outside the courthouse

during his trial. Turner corrected the accuser, noting that she'd picketed outside City Hall, but to no avail. "Same thing," he shot back.

Perhaps the only candidate who felt comfortable was Tonya Jones, Joe's wife.

She was the only one to rely entirely on a prepared speech, which she delivered with robot-like precision: "We need to come out of our comfort zones and into our commitment zones," she said dispassionately. Still, she received hearty applause.

It may have helped that the moderator, ex-state rep. Vermel M. Whalen, is also her campaign manager. And it didn't hurt when Whalen handed the microphone to Joe Jones, so that he could tout the qualities of the right leader for Ward 1.

This happened just after the ward candidates' forum ended, and a mayoral candidates' forum was about to begin. So Frank Jackson, Bill Patmon and Robert Triozzi could do nothing but listen politely as Jones commandeered the stage and implored the audience to listen carefully to those who would lead the city.

He went on to note the importance of continuing the work he began as councilman — the same items listed on his wife's campaign literature. He prattled on for at least five minutes; the forum timekeeper finally rang the bell. Then Jones took a seat with the panelists. When Mayor Jane Campbell finally arrived, Jones moved off to the side, but remained upfront.

Patmon, a former city councilman, perhaps inadvertently provided some much-needed perspective when he recalled the time he informed Jones that Ward 1 had won a \$1 million grant. "Joe said 'I'm a millionaire,'" Patmon said. "I said 'No, Joe. Ward 1 is the millionaire.'" The crowd chuckled.

— Charu Gupta

DOG DOC UPDATE ... Since the Free Times published "The Curious Case of the Cat in the Incubator" (Sept. 14), shedding light on one veterinarian's disciplinary record and the Ohio Veterinary Medical Board's failure to provide useful information to the public, the paper has received more complaints about Dr. Bruce Wolf.

One area veterinary clinic manager, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said that several animal owners have brought their pets from to her clinic after visiting Wolf's Heights Animal Hospital in Cleveland Heights. In one case, a dog who'd been limping was brought in after Wolf had failed to find the source of the pain, even after taking X-rays, the clinic manager says. It turned out to be a very apparent B.B. shot, she says.

Dr. Nancy Disbro, an area veterinarian who operates on house calls, says she was subpoenaed to testify in a 2003 case against Dr. Wolf involving a boarded dog with a badly damaged footpad that became severely infected. The case was dismissed without prejudice to Dr. Wolf.

Disbro understands that the licensing board can only address a current allegation without considering a doctor's history. But she wonders if the system could be changed.

"I'm kind of feeling like he's setting a pattern. Doesn't somebody see that? Doesn't somebody want to come out and assess things?" she asks, adding, "I'm not out to make him lose his livelihood. I just want animals to get better care."

Dr. Wolf did not respond to a request for comment before press time.

— Amy Starnes

WHEN MORTGAGE LENDERS ATTACK ... State legislators aren't waiting for the Ohio Supreme Court to sort out competing predatory lending laws ("High Interest," Sept. 21). Democrats and Republicans are circulating at least four proposals to amend the state law that was fast-tracked in 2002. None of the current bills, however, seem to be gaining traction as quickly as the original did.

The most recent was unveiled last week by Rep. Joy Padgett (R-Coshocton), on the heels of news that Ohio still leads the country in foreclosure rates. Padgett's bill would allow consumers to sue lenders over fraudulent and misleading loan practices. Sen. Marc Dann (D-Liberty Township) has been talking up a similar measure.

After participating in a Predatory Lending Study Committee, Sen. Tom Roberts (D-Dayton) wants more than just the sort of consumer activism Padgett's proposal allows. He wants sweeping reforms, such as eliminating escalating late charges, prohibiting lenders from encouraging default on existing debt and allowing additional damages when the victim is elderly or has a disability. Roberts tried the same thing, unsuccessfully, two years ago.

Finally, there's the March 2005 demand by Rep. Charles Blasdel (R-East Liverpool) for national (versus only in Ohio) criminal background checks on individual mortgage brokers and appraisers, along with more consumer education. All fine, but how about some actual lender regulation? It's no coincidence that Blasdel was also the sponsor of the current law. His latest proposal has yet to get a hearing in the House's financial committees.

Consumer advocates like the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland, a group that has fought hard for protections against predatory lending practices, seem to like all the recent legislative action. The hope is that lawmakers will find some consensus on "one good law."

— Charu Gupta

NEY'S END NIGH? ... When it comes to Congressional scandal, it's no contest: there's recently indicted Republican House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, and then there's everyone else. But Ohio's own Bob Ney is making a bid for second place. The Republican from southeastern Ohio is named in "Beyond DeLay: The 13 Most Corrupt Members of Congress," a new report from Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW), a nonprofit legal watchdog group.

For starters, Ney allegedly is taking bribes. According to e-mails released last year by super-lobbyist Jack Abramoff, now at the center of federal investigations, Ney wanted Abramoff and one of his clients, an Indian tribe based in Texas, to "cover" a golfing trip to Scotland. In exchange, Ney would help the tribe reopen its casino. Ney, however, was unable to follow through on his promise.

The second allegation involves Ney's using his congressional powers to sway a private business deal. In 2000, and again in 2005, Ney inserted comments into the Congressional Record solely intended to assist Abramoff in a deal to acquire a casino cruise line, CREW reports. Shortly after Ney's comments in 2000, Abramoff and four others associated with the sale donated \$1,000 each to Ney's reelection campaign.

— Charu Gupta

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