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Cave Creek's Sonoran News is facing lawsuit by couple

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By Philip Haldiman
The Republic | azcentral.com
Mon Aug 5, 2013 10:21 AM

A Cave Creek couple have filed a defamation suit against the publisher of a local newspaper.

Gilbert and Arsenia Lopez have filed the complaint against Don Sorchych, who also is editor of the *Sonoran News*, alleging they suffered "damage to their reputation, their standing in the community and their good name" as a result of statements published in the paper they say are false, according to court documents.

Sorchych's wife, Shari Jo, and reporter Linda Bentley also have been named in the suit.

The complaint, filed in Maricopa County Superior Court, stems from articles Sorchych published in the *Sonoran News* alleging that Gilbert Lopez, a former Cave Creek town councilman, promised the Carefree Cave Creek Chamber of Commerce just under \$10,000 to pay for an information center in 2007.

Lopez said he never made such a promise but would not comment further about the lawsuit.

"This issue is important to the public and I want this complaint to speak for itself," Lopez said.

Sorchych did not respond to a request for comment and a response had not been filed in court as of last week.

The *Sonoran News* published at least three articles regarding the alleged promise, one in 2008 and two earlier this year.

On Oct. 15, 2007, the Cave Creek Town Council considered authorizing funds not to exceed \$9,990 for an information center pilot project proposed by the Carefree Cave Creek Chamber of Commerce.

The council rejected the proposal, 6-1, with Lopez as the lone supporter, according to town minutes.

On Aug. 13, 2008, Sorchych published an editorial stating Lopez promised the chamber \$10,000. He added that former Town Manager Usama Abujbarah, whose contract was up for renewal at the time, said there wasn't room in the budget for the expenditure.

The article stated that after being told this, "Lopez threw a fit and told the town manager he wouldn't vote to renew his contract again."

After the editorial was published, Lopez refuted the statement, according to a court document.

Sorchych revisited the \$10,000 allegation in an editorial published May 1. Consequently, Lopez refuted the allegation publicly at a Town Council meeting May 6.

The court document states that, "In apparent retaliation for Mr. Lopez's refutation of the *Sonoran News*, on May 8, 2013, an article in the *Sonoran News*, authored by Linda Bentley ... stated: 'Well, putting it bluntly, Lopez is a liar and he did in fact vote to give \$10,000 to the Carefree/Cave Creek Chamber of Commerce.'"

Lopez and his lawyer, Steven Mahaffy, claim this statement and others in the *Sonoran News* were "made knowingly, recklessly, with an evil mind, or negligently and constituted defamation," and that "harm to the Lopez family continues daily," because of the statements, according to a court document.

Lopez served for more than 20 years in the U.S. Air Force and 10 years on the Cave Creek Town Council, and was vice mayor for two years.

The *Sonoran News* is printed on alternate weeks, with the online version updated weekly. It is distributed free of charge to more than 36,000 homes and businesses in the Northeast Valley, according to its website.



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