

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **HARBOR COMMISSIONER HIRES ATTORNEY**

Crescent City, California – Recent demands by a local newspaper have prompted a Crescent City elected official to help her avoid biased news coverage of her complaints against the Crescent City Harbor Commission.

“We live and work in a small town,” said Harbor Commissioner Annie Nehmer. “Local news media is taken very seriously in our community, and we depend on fair and balanced reporting of public issues” Nehmer said.

Last Saturday, Nehmer received an email from Roger Gitlin, a reporter for the Del Norte Triplicate, the most prominent local news media outlet in the Crescent City area. Nehmer was alarmed by the aggressive, confrontational tone of Gitlin’s email.

“Many of my constituents make their living in the fishing industry, so the efficient and effective operation of our Harbor Commission is important to me. It is well known that I have been critical of some spending and planning decisions the current commission has made and seems to be planning that I believe are not in the best interest of our community. I have been especially critical of decisions to extend the contract of the current Harbormaster five years and raise his salary by \$20,000 when the Harbor Commission is facing bankruptcy,” Nehmer said.

“It is widely perceived that Mr. Gitlin has close ties to the current Harbormaster,” Nehmer continued. “So when I received Mr. Gitlin’s email with demands that I drop everything on a busy weekend and respond to what I felt were questions that demonstrated Mr. Gitlin’s bias in favor of the Harbormaster, and when Mr. Gitlin refused to talk to me in person, and wouldn’t give me a little more time to respond, I felt I needed some help with this,” Nehmer said.

Nehmer retained Paul Nicholas Boylan, an attorney specializing in government transparency issues and the recipient of awards recognizing his work with investigative journalists throughout California. Most recently, Boylan was the recipient of the Society of Professional Journalist’s James Madison Freedom of Information Lifetime Achievement Award, and he successfully defended the Rio Del Times in Humboldt County against a defamation lawsuit, both in the trial court and on appeal, brought by a prominent local attorney.

“Ordinarily I work with reporters and news media outlets,” Boylan said. “It is my job to help them get the story out without getting sued for defamation, and to do that, it requires them to report the news fairly. But I also feel it is important to help people with legitimate concerns about how the public’s business is being conducted to avoid getting smeared by local press. I’m not saying that is what Mr. Gitlin intends on doing, but it is my opinion that the content of his emails to my client indicates the possibility he has already sided against her. That troubles me, and it persuaded me to accept Annie as a client.”

Boylan pointed to Gitlin’s question asking Nehmer if she believed “yet another costly legal matter will aggravate the tenuous revenue challenges affecting the CCHD.’

“Public agencies and public officials who behave badly often try to sway public opinion in their favor by arguing that complaints about how they are conducting the public’s business are costing the public a fortune,” Boylan said, “and such a loaded question could indicate a reporter’s bias in favor of the agency and officials being criticized. But the costs those officials complain about are their own fault. If they just complied with the law, and didn’t misbehave, they wouldn’t have to pay anything at all. And the lack of transparency that keeps the public in the dark about decisions vital to their welfare could ultimately cost the public far, far more than any actions taken to make sure public officials are conducting the public’s business the way the law requires.”

Nehmer filed two lawsuits against the Commission without the assistance of legal counsel. “When people are frustrated by the failure to get their concerns addressed, they often try to get some relief in this way,” Boylan said. “I haven’t looked closely at my client’s existing complaints, but I’m willing to bet there are better ways to address her concerns, and I will be talking with her about her options.”

“I am grateful for Paul’s help and guidance,” Nehmer said. “I should have contacted him a long time ago,” she said.

Boylan said he looks forward to working with the Commission’s recently hired General Counsel to amicably resolve the disputes between their respective clients.

**For questions or additional comment  
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