

# NEWS & FEATURES

## Questionable journalism in local paper

### UPEI S.U. President accuses reporter of fabricating quote

BY REBECCA MOORE

AN ARTICLE BY PATRIOT REPORTER BARB McKenna stirred some controversy, and led to serious accusations by the Student Union, before Christmas break. An anonymous father of two university students complained about the annual Scrooge event held at the Barn, which led to McKenna's article "Dad Bucks Booze Bash".

The father felt that it was inappropriate for the Barn to be holding a drinking event when students were planning to march on the RCMP barracks, protesting the serving of alcohol at the RCMP officers' mess hall, the next day. The Scrooge event was held by the Student Union (SU), and the SU had no organised group to march on the Barracks.

That was not the main problem that the S.U. had with the article published on December 16, 1993 in *The Evening Patriot*. It stated "a call to the UPEI barn confirmed that an event is planned for this evening. 'It starts at 6p.m. but you should get here early because we try to liquidate our inventory,' said the Barn staff member. 'prices for beer and shots drop every hour.'"

Not only was the information in the article false, but it was not the information given by a Barn employee, claims Todd King, President of the UPEI Student Union. The reporter had talked to an employee earlier in the day. She never identified herself as a member of the press and never asked who she was speaking to. "I in no way indicated that I was a member of the lounge staff" said David Fitzpatrick, the Barn employee who spoke with McKenna.

Fitzpatrick claims he had answered the phone with just a regular 'hello', not the usual 'hello, Panther Lounge.' "For all she knew I could have been any student who happened to be in the lounge at the time of the call, as often is the case", he said. The same extension rings in the Pit, the most popular hang-out for UPEI students. Barb McKenna admitted that she did not know the name of the person she was speaking to, but she did say that she knew it was a Barn employee.

When asked why she was able to publish a quote from an unidentified source, a practice that is against *Guardian/Patriot* policy, she stated that it had been approved by her editors. McKenna said that she called the Barn as a member of the general public to ask questions about the event. Fitzpatrick had been suspicious because of the types of questions McKenna had been asking. "The nature of her questions was much too directed for curiosity and I then assumed she must have been a reporter."

Fitzpatrick also claims that he never once stated that the Barn was holding a liquidation sale. "When I read Mrs. McKenna's article I was appalled. Nowhere in our conversation did I indicate that we were holding a liquidation sale. I remember Mrs. McKenna suggesting the notion but I denied it ... there was no way that I would even suggest what Mrs. McKenna attributed to me."

The minutes of the SU meeting concerning

the Scrooge event never mentioned that the event would be a liquidation. "It would have been ridiculous for us to liquidate our inventory when we had a New Year's Eve event planned in two weeks' time," said King.

The minutes of the meeting also stated that the cover charge for the two bands would be four dollars, with drink specials throughout the night, not every hour as the article stated. There would be three price drops, one every two hours, and drinks would go back to \$2.45 from 11pm to close. These prices had been approved by a Liquor Commission representative, says King.

"The night was designed as a cheap, post exam de-stressor ... there was a cheap door price for two great bands-- one local, and one national touring band, and for those who drink, good specials." After the article was published in the *Patriot*, the General Manager of the Barn was told by the Liquor Commission that there would be no price drops during the Scrooge event.

To compensate the disappointed students who would show up expecting a cheap night of

drinking, the SU decided to drop the cover charge. As a result they lost \$3,000 in revenue.

Fitzpatrick's statement, along with the false information published in the article, led King to believe that McKenna fabricated the quote. She was very offended by this accusation: "I did not fabricate the quote and I stand behind it ... he shouldn't say that just because he doesn't like what was printed ... If Mr. King truly believes I fabricated the quote he should take legal action because it is a serious breach of journalistic ethics."

The SU was very concerned about how the public would view the activities that they put on at the Barn after the damaging article was published. King and two other council members

met with the editor and the publisher of the paper. King raised the possibility of the fabricated quote but the editor and publisher did not seem very concerned. The editor, Gary MacDougall, was unavailable for comment.

The SU calls the event a success, even though they lost \$3,000. They had a turn-out of approximately 350 students. In a following article in the *Guardian* on December 18, 1993 Nigel Armstrong reported that there were no problems at the Scrooge event and quoted Todd King: "The mandate of the Student Union lounge is not to drink to excess but rather, to provide quality entertainment in a safe and friendly atmosphere."

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