

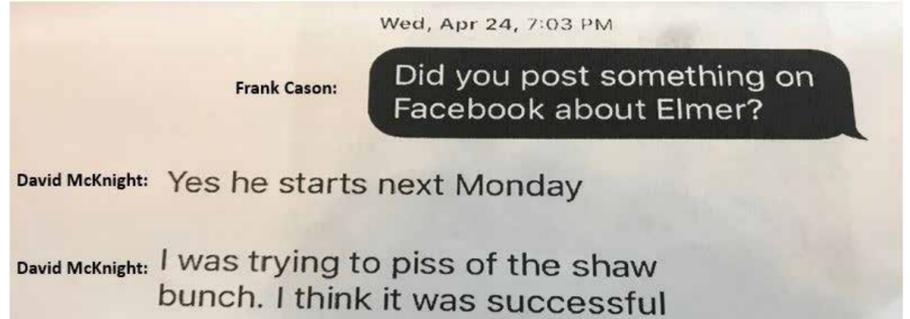


Raising the Roof

Mike Buzby and Phillip Clark of Shorty Braddock Construction position ceiling joists for a covered deck behind the historic Union Missionary Baptist Church, which is being restored and refurbished.

Hacking Claims False; Text Messages Show Sheriff Made 'Elmer' Facebook Post

By BOB PALMER
Jimplecute News Editor



Copy of text message exchange between Marion County Chief Deputy Frank Cason and Sheriff David McKnight April 24, 2019.

JEFFERSON - In a text message to Chief Deputy Frank Cason, Sheriff David McKnight admitted he made the satirical "Elmer" post on the Marion County Sheriff's Department Facebook page on April 24.

A letter, containing copies of the text messages, dated June 3 from County Attorney Angela Smoak arrived at the *Jimplecute* office Thursday morning. The *Jimplecute* sought the text messages through a Texas Public Information Act request 15 business days ago on May 15.

McKnight's exchange with Cason occurred the same night the post announcing the hiring of Elmer as the county's new animal control officer appeared on Facebook, April 24.

Cason - "Did you post something on Facebook about Elmer?"

McKnight - "Yes he starts next Monday."

McKnight - "I was trying to piss of (sic) the shaw bunch. I think it was successful."

"We would like to introduce Elmer," the announcement read. "Elmer will specialize in animal control and will be a perfect fit with our constituents who are concerned with our furry friends. Elmer says, 'If you want them caught, fed or skint, just flag me down.'"

In an interview with the *Marshall News Messenger* published April 24, McKnight claimed the department's Facebook page had been hacked.

"I don't know how it happened," McKnight told the *News Messenger*. He added, "We didn't make this post, someone had to have hacked into the account somehow but I took it down."

In the same news story, Marion County Judge Leward LaFleur supported McKnight, yet called for the facts to be known.

"I share the concern regarding this post. As you know Brook (LaFleur) and I have worked tirelessly towards ensuring the wellbeing of our homeless pet population," LaFleur told the *News Messenger*. "As for the content of this post, I'm inclined to believe that the sheriff's post was somehow hacked."

"As you recall, Sheriff McKnight, despite the baseless accusations levied against him during the Dixie Animal Shelter crisis, wrote a pretty compelling op-Ed to our local paper in which he called for all parties to move forward," he said. "Given that, let's not jump to any conclusions until more information becomes available."

"As a judicial officer, I always base my conclusion on fact and fact alone."

The *Jimp* contacted LaFleur, McKnight and Cason for comment Thursday but email requests were not returned.

Kimberly Shaw, a volunteer with Friends of Jefferson Animals (FOJA), did not find the post funny and McKnight's admission targeting Shaw pathetic.

Shaw and other animal advocates stepped in

following the collapse in December of the Marion County Humane Society, dba Dixie Humane Society, dumping almost 80 dogs on the community.

"All that my friends and I have wanted to do is to correct a travesty that allowed someone to milk untold dollars out of good-hearted people while letting animals suffer," Shaw said. "To make fun of that in such a hideous way is unconscionable."

Shaw denied she sought any advantage from the controversy.

"This has never been political for me," Shaw said. "I believe Sheriff McKnight owes me, my husband and his [McKnight's] constituents an apology, but more so, I believe [McKnight] should search his own heart to decide whether public service is really his true calling."

Shaw also considered McKnight's attack on a fellow peace officer, her husband Steven Shaw, a former Dallas Police Department officer, offensive.

"I am hurt and appalled that a law enforcement official would intentionally do or say anything to publicly and personally attack a fellow law enforcement officer," Shaw said after learning McKnight admitted to making the Elmer post.

Previously, McKnight accepted "full responsibility" for the Elmer post, but stopped short of admitting that he had personally made it. He has not made a public apology for the post or expressed regret.

McKnight also scoffed at possible fallout from the Elmer post.

"They [animal welfare advocates in Marion County] can't do anything to me," McKnight said to the *Jimplecute* on May 2 in regard to complaints that the "Elmer" post was inappropriate.

McKnight previously said he will not seek reelection. He has two years left on his current term.

Marion County Attorney Response

In her cover letter to the *Jimplecute*, Smoak questioned the *Jimplecute's* news coverage of the matter.

"Attached please find copies of the text messages requested in your previous PIA request. Personal information has been redacted as allowed under the act, however I believe that information is outside the requested time period," Smoak wrote. "It is only included so that you would not assume, as you [Bob Palmer] are prone to do, that information had been left out. Again, I believe that you are already in possession of this information based on statements by your staff but it has been provided to you again herein."

Jimplecute Publisher Mica Wilhite, in a letter dated June 6, pointed out to Smoak the county has still not complied with the newspaper's May 15 request.

"As you know, we requested 'Records and copies of any electronic communication created, transmitted, received, or maintained on any

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Paddie Tells Jimp Plumbing Board Needed to Change; Legislative Session Saw Laws Impact State & Local Issues

By BOB PALMER
Jimplecute News Editor

AUSTIN - End-of-session turmoil over the death of the Texas State Board of Plumbing Examiners could have been avoided, if proposed legislation reforming the board had passed, Chris Paddie, R-Marshall and vice-chair of the House Sunset Committee, said in an exclusive interview with the *Jimplecute*.

"In no way was this because we didn't value what plumbers do or respect the critical role that they play in our society," Paddie said.

Following the Sunset review of the Plumbing Board in 2002, the agency was given a list of needed improvements.

"Without question, of the 32 agencies that we reviewed this time in Sunset," Paddie said, "it's not even close, the Plumbing Board was the most poorly run, least effective, inefficient agency by far, and they just never really showed any real admittance of that and any real willingness to correct the problem."

Paddie also blasted the Plumbing Board for failure to respond to the crisis following Hurricane Harvey as other state agencies had.

Gov. Greg Abbott has said he can use emergency powers to keep the board functioning after legislation reauthorizing its existence failed to pass in the Legislature.

Despite the fracas over plumbing licensing, Paddie believes the Legislature this year successfully tackled major issues confronting Texas.

"It's one of those sessions that we can kind of look back and there is really a pretty significant list of things that we can look back and say, 'You know what, we did some pretty big stuff this time, and some things that are going to have a big impact going forward,'" Paddie said. "It was a long session, a very busy session, but a really good one."

School finance and property tax reform led the parade.

"What I think I'll most remember about this session is our two key priorities that we came into this, and that is school finance reform and married to that, is property tax reform," Paddie said. "Ultimately some property tax relief that we ended was achieved. I think we were able to accomplish



State Rep. Chris Paddie

something that hasn't been accomplished in decades (on school finance)."

Paddie also took pride in his part in a bill of local interest. One bill was in response to electrocution of three Hallsville Boy Scouts in a 2017 boating accident on Lake O' the Pines.

"We passed House Bill 4150 this session to add additional requirements for inspection and overall safety improvements in hopes of preventing that type of tragedy from ever happening again," Paddie said.

The state representative in his fourth term expressed hope that something good could come from a "terrible tragedy."

"We do a lot of big stuff, but sometimes those types of bills are the ones that you'll remember longer than some of these others that we do," Paddie said.

The Marshall Republican also serves on the House Redistricting Committee and has taken a peek at the numbers the Legislature will use in 2021. In 2011, House districts contained approximately 165,000 people. Following the 2020 Census, the size of a Texas House district will grow to about 200,000.

"My district, obviously, hasn't grown by that many people," Paddie said. "What that likely means is that we have to figure out where I go grab another 25,000-30,000 people."

According to Paddie's figures, a Texas Senate seat will soon represent more than 1 million Texans. A U.S. House of Representative will represent more than 750,000.

More on PADDIE, see page 8

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