



“Setting the record straight”

Sheriff Ashley’s response to the North West Florida Daily News article of December 2, 2010 titled “*Ashley offers to rehire deputies*”

On Thursday, December 2, 2010, in an article titled: “Ashley offers to rehire deputies” North West Florida Daily News writer Tom McLaughlin reports that I called the employees at the center of the Sheriff’s Offices pending personnel actions “selfish and self centered”. *That is not true, I did not say that*, and I told Mr. McLaughlin I did not say that before the story ever went to print. Mr. McLaughlin failed to report that on the evening of Wednesday, December 1, 2010, I spent over an hour with Mr. McLaughlin answering his questions and discussing numerous issues of interest at the Sheriff’s Office to include the personnel actions. I had no intention of disparaging the five deputies in question and I did not do so. Later that evening, after reading an online version of the story, I called Mr. McLaughlin and told him he had misquoted me, and that I had not called these individuals “selfish and self centered”. I asked him to correct that mistake and he refused.

To my frustration Mr. McLaughlin also failed to report that we discussed numerous topics other than the five deputies involved in the ongoing personnel issue. At one point during the interview I spoke about critics and opponents both inside and outside the Sheriff’s Office who I believed tried to exploit the troubles of the Sheriff Office for their own personal gain. That was the context in which I used the language “selfish and self centered” but those

comments were not directed towards any individual or group of individuals by name, and certainly not the five deputies in question.

To the contrary, during the interview I specifically told Mr. McLaughlin that I would not make any disparaging comments about the employees in question and corrected him on occasion when he attempted to have me confirm or refute his observations about one of these employees. When I informed Mr. McLaughlin that individual personnel files were available for his review as public records and should be reviewed as part of his due diligence in reporting the facts, he indicated that he did not have the time to conduct an in depth review of those files because his deadlines demanded that a story be published. Undersheriff Don Adams attended the interview with Mr. McLaughlin and can attest to the content and context of my comments.

Let me re-emphasize that I do not intend to make any disparaging remarks about those who were not retained, demoted, or re-appointed under my authority as Sheriff. I wish them well in their future endeavors, and harbor no animosity towards them. All of these things were factors in my offer to re-appoint them under my authority as Sheriff.

As your new Sheriff, I've spent the past three weeks working hard to define and implement the new mission of your Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office; "Ensuring fair and equal administration of the law, safeguarding civil liberties and preserving public safety; Doing so with professionalism and unity of purpose, while being good stewards of the public's trust." I'm working diligently toward our goals of transparency, restructuring, consolidation, and physical fitness. I've attended Chamber Breakfasts, spoken at citizen meetings, and met with numerous public officials. I want the public to be aware of these things because the newspaper's spotlight has been focused solely on personnel decisions I made at the onset of my term, based on assembling a Command Staff and team of supervisors who share and support my management

philosophies and goals of maintaining accreditation. It is time to put this matter to rest and to move on with the overriding interest of serving the citizens of Okaloosa County.

Larry Ashley

**Larry R. Ashley, Sheriff
Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office**