

**Letter to Times on Nov. 13th Editorial & Nov. 14th Gadsden Column
(Letter was not published by the Times)**

A recent St. Petersburg Times editorial (Don't overreact to e-mails on race, Nov. 13) and Sandra Gadsden column (Neighborhood group may be in need of new leadership, Nov. 14) addressed harsh and offensive remarks made by two of approximately 55 Council of Neighborhood Association (CONA) board members in what was intended to be a private discussion on the organization's Internet forum. Of the 55 board members, 12 participated in the exchange and the great majority of these exchanges were positive and sensitive in addressing difficult subjects. As stated in the Times editorial as CONA president I quickly disavowed the negative tone reflected in messages of two contributors and reiterated CONA's long-standing commitment to diversity and representing all parts of the city. CONA has recently accelerated its efforts to strengthen neighborhoods in the Midtown area, including assistance with crime watch activities and maintaining the Jenny Hall Pool.

Gadsden referred to outdated CONA bylaws that were on CONA's web site along with a more current version. I do not appoint the Nominating Committee as she stated, or any other officer or standing committee chair. Officers and chairs are elected directly by the CONA board. Sometimes this results in the election of officers with different views on policy, which adds diversity, balance, and at times conflict to our discussions.

I intervened in the email discussion on the second day urging CONA's full support of the Circus McGurkis, and again on the morning of the fourth day (Oct. 30). The offensive emails were written by two persons on the night of Oct. 28 and on Oct. 29.

With the column, my photo was placed alongside senior city administrator Goliath Davis' photo. Some may perceive this to suggest an adversarial posture. That is not the case. My interactions with Davis have been few but courteous. In a meeting earlier this year with Mayor Bill Foster I made it clear that CONA has not taken any position critical of any city employee. CONA addresses policy, not personalities. Stephen Corsetti's comments regarding Davis reflect neither my views nor those of CONA. I have apologized to the mayor for his remarks and apologize to Davis. This is not to deny other positive contributions Stephen Corsetti has made to our community.

While CONA's advocacy for our neighborhoods is sometimes constructively critical of city proposals, we have for the most part been supportive and often enthusiastic. Recent examples include the new city curbside recycling program, the 2011 city budget, the no vehicle solicitation ordinance, new programs for the homeless, better enforcement of the yard parking code, and recent effective efforts to reduce crime. We meet regularly with the mayor and the police chief to review matters of mutual concern and to seek positive ways to complement each other's efforts to improve the quality of life in our city for all residents.

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