

PRESS RELEASE

The Village of Prairie Grove is aware of accusations that it allegedly cited Gianelli's Drive-Through for flying a United States flag. The accusation is false and a gross misrepresentation of facts and circumstances.

The manager of Gianelli's, Terry Trobiani, has been a long-time vocal critic of the Village's ordinance that regulates business signage, high-visibility temporary signs such as A-frames, feather flags, banners and the like. The Village of Prairie Grove is a predominantly residential community with high aesthetic standards, including reasonable regulations of temporary signage. Manager Trobiani has made his thoughts on the Village's sign ordinance known in multiple Letters to the Editor, containing misrepresentations of the Village's actions and personal insults toward Village Board members.

Recognizing the strain that Covid-19 was placing on small businesses and restaurants in particular, the Village President signed Executive Order 2020-01 in March, 2020, temporarily allowing temporary signage. The Order explicitly stated that it would expire upon revocation or expiration of Governor Pritzker's Executive Order No. 2020-07 which mandated mask usage and social distancing in businesses in response to the then rapidly-rising Covid 19 infection rate. Earlier this year, the Governor's Executive Order expired, and the Village President thereafter terminated Executive Order 2020-01. At that time, the Village's original sign ordinance went back into effect. Deborah Peterson, the owner of Gianelli's, was notified via email that the executive order had been rescinded.

Afterwards, the Village noticed that Gianelli's was continuing to display temporary signage, in particular, feather flags, A-frames and banners in front of its business and on the right-of-way of Route 176. It also realized that Gianelli's had placed American flags on the right-of-way of Route 176 which is violation of both local and state law. Over the course of a month, Village staff – including the Village building inspector, Village administrator, Village police chief and a Village police officer - explained to Manager Trobiani that Gianelli's was in violation of the sign ordinance and that the business would be ticketed if it did not comply.

After multiple warnings, Manager Trobiani complied in part by removing all temporary signs and then stated in defiance that he was “*going to WalMart to buy more American Flags to*

put in the ground,” and furthermore that he was going to call veterans and the VFW to stand outside of his business and “*watch what happens when the Village attempts to take those flags down.*” The Village Administrator explained to Manager Trobiani that flags in the right-of-way were prohibited both in type and placement on the highway and that they needed to come down or be moved to an allowed location. Ultimately Gianelli’s received two citations. Ironically, the citations at issue are not for Gianelli’s long-standing defiance and violation of the temporary sign ordinance, but rather for improperly placing the US flag on a state right-of-way.

This action appears to have been an effort to set the Village up for public scrutiny for an issue it did not create. Again, it is simply a violation of State and local Municipal Code to place anything on the right-of-way of a state highway. This was explained to Manager Trobiani, who again became irate and refused to cooperate. As a result of non-compliance, Gianelli’s was cited for placing flags in the right-of-way of a state highway and for improper display of the United States flag.

Manager Trobiani responded to attempts by Village staff to obtain compliance by yelling obscenities as well as threatening lawsuits and writing letters to the Northwest Herald rife with half-truths, misrepresentations, and flat-out lies. It is to be noted that after the Village President signed the executive order providing relief from the sign ordinance regulations for almost a year, Gianelli’s did nothing notable to increase its visibility by utilizing new forms of signage displays or advertising. Furthermore, the current sign ordinance provides that business owners can petition the Village twice a year, for a month at a time, to use temporary signage. The Village has not once received such a petition from Gianelli’s.

The Village of Prairie Grove enthusiastically encourages the proper flying of the United States flag. The Village’s Municipal Code sets forth regulations for displaying the US flag and furthermore adopts the United States Flag Code therein.

The Village sets provisions for flying the United States flag so that it is displayed with the utmost respect that it deserves. The American flag is a symbol of our freedom, democracy, and the liberties we hold dear. For that reason, the Village upholds its high standards and requires all US flags to be flown from permanent flag poles or staffs. Manager Trobiani received a copy of the pertinent Village code, and chose to use the American flag disrespectfully, as a weapon to fight the Village on his issue with the sign ordinance.

Gianelli's placement of the United States flags on a state highway right-of-way left them vulnerable, unsecured, susceptible to being blown over and being dirtied by vehicle traffic. In previous instances, Gianelli's has used American Flags as decorations attached to A-frame signs with tape. The Village has witnessed these flags blown off and left on the ground for days at a time. Gianelli's has attached small American flags to State/IDOT directional signs outside of its business with duct tape, left to be tattered by weather and blown off into the dirt. The Village finds these practices unacceptable.

Manager Trobiani has misled both the Press and the public into thinking that the Village of Prairie Grove cited him simply for flying a US flag, when in fact Manager Trobiani's actions were very clearly intended to taunt the Village and stoke a fire under the guise of civil liberties.

The Village is proud to uphold the federal standards for displaying the United States flag; and, despite Manager Trobiani's public claims to the contrary, the Village is vehemently supportive of *all* its businesses. It is disappointing and offensive that a business manager would present such a blatantly distorted version of the facts to the public, rallying others under a false pretense of a violation of freedom of speech and using the symbol of our democracy as a tool in a twisted ploy to further his own commercial interest in displaying temporary signage.

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