

VETERANS POST

Whistleblower Act Doesn't Work

by **Freddy Groves**

The Whistleblower Protection Act of 2017 was designed to hold employees accountable, investigate allegations and protect whistleblowers from retaliation, including from supervisors, at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

It isn't working. The VA's Office of the Inspector General investigated complaints from June 2017 until August 2019. The OIG discovered that:

-- The Office of Accountability and Whistleblower Protection (OWAP) often farmed out

investigations instead of handling them in-house. In 2,526 cases it sent investigations to other departments that weren't equipped to handle them.

-- It failed to protect whistleblowers' identities, which resulted in 51 cases of whistleblower retaliation.

-- OWAP butted in with investigations into areas that weren't within its scope and ignored some of those it should have handled. It was supposed to refer criminal cases to the Office of the Inspector General, but did so only 38 times.

-- It didn't provide clear written guidance or training

for personnel. More than a year after it started, the OWAP still didn't have a way of identifying errors and ensuring that the work was not biased.

Additionally, it didn't get all the facts, including witness statements, in each case.

One case was investigated in a way that was likely intentionally retaliatory against the whistleblower by a supervisor who was apparently a social pal of someone high up in OWAP. The whistleblower (and others) had previously complained about the supervisor. The whistleblower was never even interviewed, and

the others were hesitant to report allegations because of the social ties of the two senior staff.

-- Many cases took over a year to close. Discipline or penalties were random and subjective. Evidence was withheld. In cases of whistleblower retaliation, the whistleblower was forced to agree to having his/her identity revealed.

Wow! Where is the incentive for those who want to do the right thing to come forward?

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SENIOR NEWS LINE

Scammers Want Your DNA ... and Medicare Number

By **Matilda Charles**

Scammers will exploit every possible opportunity to commit fraud against seniors. This time they're going after our DNA.

The newest fraud involves billing Medicare for special testing that our doctors haven't asked for. As is typical, they go for our vulnerabilities. These scammers claim they have tests for Parkinson's, cancer, dementia, hereditary cancer and more. All we have to do to guard our health is to agree to these "free" tests and submit to a cheek swab right on the spot, or they'll send us a kit in the mail or come to our home. All they need in order to get us the results, they say, is our Medicare information.

That's what they really want, our Medicare number, so they can submit a claim for the tests, some costing \$9,000 to \$11,000 each. If Medicare turns down the request for payment, you could be liable for the full amount.

Beware being approached by anyone when you're out and about. The DNA scammers approach seniors at fairs, the farmers market, by phone, in a parking lot, at aging conferences, health fairs or even at events set up by their community or church. (One group thought they were getting free ice cream to listen to a presentation.)

If someone approaches you about these "free" DNA tests, say no. If you receive a test in the mail anyway, do not open it. Go online to oig.hhs.gov/fraud/hotline and tell them about the test. Or you can call 1-800-447-8477, which is the hotline for the Department of Health and Human Services. You also can call Medicare, your local police and the state attorney general.

Never give anyone your Medicare number or personal information unless it's your regular doctor. Besides the phony DNA tests, you could become a victim of other kinds of fraud.

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GOLDSBORO

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six to eight months to complete. At the end of the time, the chosen company would provide zoning analysis and code proposals for Goldsboro.

Eliza Harris Juliano of Canin Associates said her company would work with Veronica Anderson, an attorney from Sanford, to work with the community through workshops, door to door meetings, church gatherings, and social media to discover what residents favor for rezoning the historic neighborhood. She said they would look at specific needs such as sidewalks and jobs, among other things.

They would look at national best practices, but also look at how opportunities for small businesses are inhibited and how rezoning could improve the way people live and work in the various parts of the neighborhood. Research and innovation would highlight the future for Goldsboro, she said.

KCI's Project Manager Heidi Siegel said she and others from their team come from city planning departments. "We understand what works and what doesn't work," she said of their

shared experience. "We write code and we write land use amendments."

There would be a focus on young people, Siegel said. She mentioned that she has been familiar with Goldsboro for a while through studying African Americans in the Jim Crow South for her history degree. She came to city planning in order to make a living, she said.

Five firms sent in proposals for working to rezone Goldsboro, and staff narrowed those down to Canin and KCI as finalists. District 4 Commissioner Patty Mahany said both plans "look fantastic," but there was some question about who would make the final determination to get the contract, the City Commission or staff.

District 1 Commission Art Woodruff questioned whether the plan overlapped previous work. District 3 Commission Patrick Austin wanted to know how the people of Goldsboro are going to buy into a rezoning plan, that "we're going to actually do something" this time.

Mayor Jeff Triplett said since staff has worked so closely with these companies that he would be fine with staff making the final decision. The rest of the Commission seemed to agree. The matter will eventually come to the City Commission as a budget amendment for the cost of the study that is chosen.

FILM

Continued from Page 1

the place could be a film location. An indie film took them up on the offer.

Executive Producer Ray Lloyd said the film is an "untitled action adventure film." Talking during a break in shooting on Monday, he said they starting working in Sanford four days before, and that shooting around the city should last until Dec. 14.

Lloyd said he hoped to get a PG-13 rating on the movie. Local crews and local actors are working on the film. That includes help from the Valencia College film production program as well as Full Sail University in Winter Park.

Film executives said they would need extras for some of the scenes shot in Sanford.

Sandhi Gupta, herself a recent graduate of Full Sail, is the second assistant director for the movie. She said anyone interested in being an extra can email them at

actionscifilmextra@gmail.com. She said to write that you want to be cast as an extra in the feature film being shot in Sanford.

One scene that will need 50 or so extras is scheduled for Dec. 2 and 3 next to the Sanford Civic Center.

"It's like a county fair or festival," Gupta said. "We'll need families, couples, and others."

For now, Lloyd said they didn't want to reveal much about the movie, but that as filming ends he could share more.

Magpies features a modern

spin on historic general stores. According to magpiesmodern-general.com, the store has artisan soaps, apothecary items, housewares and gifts "both funky and functional." The store calls supporting local crafts and goods a way of life.

"As often as possible, we stock our nest with goods made right here in Central Florida," the website says. "We also gladly make space for goods made by community conscious, small-batch companies outside our area."

FESTIVAL

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the festival is free.

"Romanian food is absolutely delicious and full of flavor," Nacu told The Sanford Herald. The ingredients are organic, she added, and "It's good for you."

Nacu herself arrived in the United States in 1987 as new immigrant in New York City. She said she was a political refugee in the final years before the Romanian revolution that ousted and killed long-time Romanian Communist leader Nicolae Ceausescu.

Settling in Sanford where she lived for 29 years, Nacu is the owner of Park Place Inn and Cottages in the city. Previously she opened the Rose Cottage Tea Room at Park Place. She was a founding member of the Sanford Historic Preservation Board.

Money raised through the Romanian Traditions Festival will fund a program called Believe You Can, which helps orphaned children around the world to believe in themselves, interact with others and build a positive mindset, Nacu said.

Romania has had an ongoing problem with neglected children. Nacu described the current situation in her former country where children end up in foster care, and sometimes grow up in the maternity wards of hospitals.

With money from the initial festival last year, Nacu said they were able to make improvements in the maternity section of a specific hospital in Romania. They renovated

the ward and added beds, needed supplies, pajamas and toys for the children.

This year, the money will go to help spread the Believe You Can program in Romania. The program is aimed at children 4 to 7 years old. Nacu said it helps with early mental development that is sometimes delayed in a foster care or orphanage situation.

Believe You Can was introduced to Romania a year ago in the city of Cluj, Nacu said. It is available in many countries now.

Among the arts and crafts at the festival will be Nacu's benches, a project she began to help raise money for Romanian children, but also in memory of her grandmother's bench, a tradition in the Eastern European country.

"The old tradition of Romanian benches played an important role in the life of the village," Nacu recalled. It was a meeting point. There would often be a bench at the gate to welcome people. It was the place to sit and catch up with friends and family, she said.

"Sitting on the bench was the Facebook of our time," Nacu said. Except this was not digital, but real personal sharing on the bench, she added.

Benches could also be found near the entryway of Romanian houses, Nacu explained. It would be the spot to place things that one would put down to open the door. She recalled playing all day, then sitting on the bench with her grandmother, who would talk about the day.

"We would talk about how we got a bruise while playing, or how we lost a button," Nacu said. Sometimes, they would be scolded, but there was always love shared on the bench.

Nacu's benches will be on sale at the festi-



Photo contributed

A bench stop at a previous festival where the benches were sold.

val, but they can also be purchased at the Park Place Inn and Cottages. They are sturdy benches made by Nacu herself out of white German pine. Each bench has a special word or phrase, and they can be custom made as well, she said.

Each bench, as the traditional entry gate seating is called, costs \$250.

The festival has also announced a call for artists, Nacu said. There is a call for Romanian students, artists, craftsmen, potters, cloth makers, instrumentalists, singers and dancers to submit their art or talent to the festival. Those interested can call Anna Brunelli at 407-497-2326 before the Nov. 25 deadline.

IN LOVING MEMORY & CELEBRATION
OF THE LIFE OF
REV. ROBERT L. BROWN, SR.



WHO MADE HIS
SPIRITUAL TRANSITION ON
NOVEMBER 14, 2018

THE BROWN FAMILY
ROBERT, ROBBYNE, WILLETTE,
BERNARD, DOROTHY & BETTY

FUNERAL HOME NOTICE
New 2019 Obituary Policy
SANFORD HERALD

Beginning January 1, 2019
Obituary notices published in the Sanford Herald

Obituaries pricing of 50 words or less will be free.
Over 50 words there will be a \$30 charge with a limit of 200 words.
200 words or more will have an additional cost of 10¢ per word.
Note that a picture is included in cost.

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In Loving Memory & Celebration
DAPHNE FRANCIS
HUMPHREY



Who made her
Spiritual Transition on
November 12, 2018

Betty L. Brown, Family & Friends