

I am responding to last week's guest editorial in this paper written by the president of the Calistoga Police Officers Association (CPOA), Mark Harden. His column contained factually inaccurate information that Mr. Harden persists in repeating regarding the City's support of destination marketing efforts executed by the Chamber of Commerce. While I have personally shown Mr. Harden documentation for Visitor Center expenditures and budget, he maintains publicly that this information doesn't exist, which is not just an implausible claim; it is patently untrue. Mr. Harden states, also incorrectly, that the city contract with the Chamber is "about \$400,000." The actual figure is \$302,000. What is most troubling and should be of concern to you as local business owners and residents is that Mr. Harden, on behalf of the CPOA, has initiated a boycott of Calistoga businesses. They have disseminated information through a statewide organization of 65,000 police officers, family and friends, to attempt to spread the word on a national basis that Calistoga is a "labor-unfriendly" city and its businesses should be boycotted.

Additionally, Mr. Harden references a 30% decrease in compensation that was imposed upon the CPOA. In actuality (facts provided by the City of Calistoga) the maximum decline experienced by any CPOA member was 21% with a majority of the membership receiving a 14% decline in total benefits including city funded pension and healthcare. There was no decline in actual wages. Regardless of whether that number was 30% or 21%, it certainly is not ideal but it is the reality of the current economy that the private sector has been experiencing for the better part of 5 years. How many businesses in town have experienced declines in revenue of 21% or greater over this period? How many of your employees have had wages and or benefits reduced at a much larger rate than 21%? In years past, all elements of our City have benefitted from economic upswings, CPOA included, and we all need to make sacrifices during the downturns as well. The pendulum swings both ways!

Regardless of where you stand on the contract dispute, we can all agree that initiating a boycott of Calistoga businesses is an irresponsible action that points out the lack of understanding by the CPOA of how Calistoga's basic economics function. Here are the undeniable facts: **The Chamber's \$302,000 destination marketing contract with the city represents just 4.3% of the general fund budget, yet it consistently generates 52% (\$3.4 million dollars last year) of the general fund through Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT).** This is an eleven times return on investment to the city, which by any standard is a solidly successful result. Through tourism, our businesses are the engines which generate the sales tax and transient occupancy tax that funds \$0.50 of every dollar the Police Department receives in compensation and benefits. To support any effort resulting in the reduction of these revenues is counterproductive.

The Chamber is fully accountable to the city for every penny of its budget and presents annual reports documenting all destination marketing & publicity activities. We cannot think of a more inappropriate action by the CPOA than to call for a boycott just as we are working our way into better economic times after years of focused effort. If you agree this boycott action could have negative consequences for our entire community, I urge you to express your opinion on this matter directly to the CPOA, City Council and City Manager.

Chris Canning
Executive Director, Calistoga Chamber of Commerce