

From ***RON CRAWFORD'S SEWERWATCH...***

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She *is* Los Osos, Part I



For me, the sewer story is the second best story out of Los Osos, and it's a distant second.

Without question, the much richer, more fascinating, and blow-your-hair-back interesting story is the impact one person, Pandora Nash-Karner, and her marketing business has had on not only Los Osos, but even more astounding, on one powerful government agency after another -- from the California Coastal Commission to the Regional Water Quality Control Board -- agencies that should know better, yet, ultimately, were just more victims, in a long line of victims, of Nash-Karner's brand of marketing -- a brand she terms "behavior based."

I don't know how to put this nicely, so I'm just going to put it: There is no doubt about it, the marketing efforts in Los Osos of former Community Services District vice-president, Pandora Nash-Karner, since at least 1997, are directly responsible for every nickel poured

down the Los Osos sewer drain over the last ten years, *at least*. The evidence is overwhelming, and ugly.

Awhile back, I wrote a piece on this blog called [*Contrast*](#). In that piece, I showed how Nash-Karner developed a strategy to get people from her e-mail list to contact Roger Briggs, the executive officer at the local Water Quality Control Board, and demand that Briggs immediately begin fining the Los Community Services District, and individual property owners in Los Osos, many of whom are elderly and on fixed incomes.

The goal of that particular strategy was to "fine the LOCSD out of existence," according to Nash-Karner, in an effort to get the fate of the mid-town Tri-W project, a project that she deeply covets (for heretofore unknown reasons), out of the hands of the newly elected District Directors, that were never going to build it, and into the hands of administrators with the county of San Luis Obispo. That goal was ultimately accomplished not through enforcement actions, but through State legislation.

For this piece, I want to pull back the curtain on yet another Nash-Karner "strategy," a behind-the-scenes look at how she goes about her business.

This Nash-Karner strategy is from August, 2005, one month before the recall election that would see Nash-Karner's fellow Solution Group members, Gordon Hensley and Stan Gustafson, along with like-minded Director, Richard LeGros recalled. This time around, her strategy's goal was to publicly discredit then-minority board members, Lisa Schicker and Julie Tacker, both fierce opponents, understandably, of Nash-Karner's mid-town sewer plant located at the Tri-W location. Her reasoning went along these lines: Discredit Tacker and Schicker, and because they support the recall, then the recall itself is undermined.

Warning: The way she goes about her business is ugly. If you are susceptible to queasiness, take your nausea "medicine" now.

Let's pull back the curtain and take a peek, shall we?

[In an e-mail to her "Undisclosed List"](#), forwarded to me by a reliable source, Nash-Karner writes:

"Hello all,

It's time to launch a serious letter writing campaign to the local media."

I want to stop right there. It's time? So blasé, like she's done it a million times, "Yea, well, here we go *again*, time for me to orchestrate yet *another* one of my serious letter writing campaigns to the local media, blah, blah, blah..."

What kind of person does that? I've met a lot of people in my life, but I only know one person that coordinates "serious letter writing campaigns" time and time and time again. The weird thing is, she usually self-appoints herself to that role.

She continues:

"Attached is a lengthy list of ideas for letters to the editor." and; "Just use the ideas as CONCEPTS to write your own original letter."

Stop.

How is that not incredibly insulting to the people she's sending it to? A freaking "lengthy list of ideas?" "Use the ideas as CONCEPTS?" Are you kidding me? In essence, she's telling these people that they're too stupid to come up with their own solid arguments? She treats them like they're 12-years-old.

"Joyce Albright found out today that the Tribune will be allowing a section, once per week, on the sewer issue. Please do NOT copy the

concepts in your letter, otherwise, the media will recognize our efforts as a group effort and we lose our credibility."

You know, some people read my posts, like this one, that deal with Nash-Karner, and think I dislike her. That is a misconception. I *love* Nash-Karner. She makes for one of the best stories I've ever seen, let alone covered... extensively. She's awesome, from a journalism point of view.

"... the media will recognize our efforts as a group effort and we lose our credibility."

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Memo to Pandora Nash-Karner: I can't speak for all of the other media members in the county that you've coddled for decades, but, just so you're clear on this -- *SewerWatch* recognized your efforts long ago, and, long ago, you lost your credibility around here.

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On her [marketing business](#) web site, she refers to the media as "tools."

Awhile back, I e-mailed local radio talk show host, Dave Congalton, to get his reaction to Nash-Karner referring to him as a "tool." He would just say that she is a "wonderful person." During the run-up to the crucial election in 1998 that formed the LOCSD, Nash-Karner appeared on Congalton's show frequently to promote the Solution Group's flawed ponding system project, a project that would eventually fail in dramatic, yet quiet, fashion two years later. Congalton nicknamed that project "Pandoroland," and to this day, the two remain on a first-name basis.

Also on her web site, she lists another local talk radio show host, Bill Benica, as a "consultant" for her marketing business. Benica has been taking phone calls and discussing the Los Osos sewer situation on his radio show for years, at the same time working closely with, and

pulling a check from, Nash-Karner.

She is also on a first-name basis with the *Opinion* page editor at the *Tribune*, Bill Morem, and has been since at least 1990, documents show. During the run-up to the recall election in 2005, the *Tribune* ran three separate editorials, including one on election day, that backed Nash-Karner's efforts.

On her web site, she refers to the media as "tools." (Oh, I'm sorry. Did I already mention that?)

When I was the editor of *The Bay Breeze* (now *The Bay News*) from 1996-99, I witnessed, first-hand, all up-close and personal like, her attempts to manipulate the media. She used to contact our office all the time, and send me an endless stream of marketing material and press releases, *by far* more than any other individual, or organization... BY FAR!

In 1997, when I, unlike Nash-Karner's friends at the *Sun Bulletin*, waited to publicize the Solution Group's Community Plan, the first project slated for Tri-W, until a study determining the merits of that project was completed, she flipped. Lots of angry phone calls and threatening letters, the "you're going to lose advertising and go out of business" type of letters. Nasty, ugly stuff. Bad noise. By the way, good thing I waited. That study -- the [*Questa Study*](#) -- showed that her Community Plan was deeply, deeply flawed. Now *THAT* I published... on the front page... above the fold... in the biggest font size that I ever used for a headline the entire three years I was editing the *Breeze*.

The *Questa Study* would eventually prove to be 100-percent accurate. After the results of the *Questa Study* were published, first by *The Bay Breeze* (a scoop that I am still proud of today), Nash-Karner launched in to yet *another*, community-wide-saturation, behavior based marketing strategy in an effort to discredit Questa Engineering, the authors of the study. However, in the end, Questa Engineering was

uncannily accurate, and if Nash-Karner's Solution Group had simply heeded the gigantic red flags raised in that 1998 study, the Los Osos Community Services District would have never formed and the county's project would have been completed years ago.

I mean it. Pandora Nash-Karner makes for one of the best stories I've ever seen. The profound impact one person's marketing can have on a community is a much richer story than a public works disaster, which is nothing more than a by-product of the awesome Nash-Karner story, anyway.

She took me out to lunch one time in the early 90s. I was fresh out of journalism school and working as a reporter for *The Bay News* (*The Bay News* morphed into *The Bay Breeze* and then it morphed back into *The Bay News*... long story). In fact, she treated the entire staff of *The Bay News*, all five of us, including a current editor at the *Tribune*, Jay Thompson (great guy, great journalist), to lunch that day at Don Eduardo's (that restaurant is called something else these days, but I forgot what it is), at the end of Second Street, near the pier.

I'll never forget sitting there, eating my tacos, and thinking to myself, "Why is this person schmoozing us? No other individual schmoozes us. Is she expecting some sort of repayment for this lunch?" I was uncomfortable with that strange setting -- the five of us, and Nash-Karner. That was the first time I viewed Nash-Karner with a hint of suspicion. After that lunch, she would contact us repeatedly, for years, but she never took us out to lunch again.

Back to Nash-Karner's 2005 strategy:

"We need to repetitiously communicate a simple message: A VOTE FOR THE FUTURE OF LOS OSOS IS A NO VOTE ON C, D & E, AND A NO VOTE ON MEASURE B. (Please do not use the word initiative)."

One of my favorite aspects of Nash-Karner is that she thinks she is much better at manipulating people than she actually is, as the last

three elections in Los Osos show. (Los Ososans might also remember a silly publicity stunt she pulled a couple of years back (see photo above) where she rented of a bunch of port-a-potties, blanketed them with a lot of confusing campaign slogans, and then drug them around town for a few days. Yea... that seemed to work out good for her. Not too embarrassing.) For example, in that quote above, she's attempting to "communicate a simple message" to the people of Los Osos because, apparently, she considers them too stupid to grasp a message filled with honest, meaningful content, and her "simple" message is this:

"A VOTE FOR THE FUTURE OF LOS OSOS IS A NO VOTE ON C, D & E, AND A NO VOTE ON MEASURE B."

Huh?

Let me see if I have her "simple" message straight: A VOTE for the future of Los Osos (I'm already confused) is if I VOTE on... no, no, no... *don't* VOTE ON B so the future... ummmm... errrrrr... Los Osos is a NO vote ON A & E, D, C, and sometimes B, I think, which is an Initiative... or is it a Measure? And if B is a Measure, then what are C, E... oh wait, I see now... E, A, D, C & B are Measure Initiatives from the future that are a VOTE for a NO VOTE... ahhhh, screw it.

Why wasn't her simple message something like this:

"Reject the recall"

(Hey, that's pretty damn good. Maybe "Save the Dream," the shady, private group that Nash-Karner formed and marketed for during the recall campaign, should have thrown all their money at me, instead.)

Her skills (and I'm not comfortable using that word to describe the way she goes about her marketing business) seem to have slipped over the years. For example, in 1998, when she was in her prime, during the run-up to the CSD election, the simple message she chose

to "repetitiously communicate" in Los Osos was, "Better, Cheaper, Faster."

Now THAT'S simple.

And when it comes to repetition, there's no contest. Check it out:

"Better, Cheaper, Faster."

"Better, Cheaper, Faster."

"Better, Cheaper, Faster."

Yea, that works. Clean, easy to remember, effective. Good job.

But, now, 10 years after "Better, Cheaper, Faster," this is the best she can come up with:

"A VOTE FOR THE FUTURE OF LOS OSOS IS A NO VOTE ON C, D & E, AND A NO VOTE ON MEASURE B.

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See? The repetition just doesn't quite have the same snap, the same impact that it used to.

"Please do not use the word initiative."

Right, good advice. That's always an integral part of any good smear campaign. I bet I know why the recall was successful. Because one of Nash-Karner's letter writers inadvertently used the word "initiative" when they should have used "Measure." Oh, so close.

Again, if I was on her e-mail list and she sent me that stuff, I'd be pissed. "How stupid do you think I am? Who are *you* to tell me which words to use?"... would be my reply. But her recipients don't do that.

They actually listen to her. Big mistake.

"SCHICKER AND TACKER: Please do not refer to them as "women," let's not make a gender issue out of the campaign. You can refer to them as: CSD dissidents, CSD minority members, anti-project CSD members, CSD opposition leaders, etc."

I don't even know what to say to that. It's so creepy. Every time I see a real-life example of Nash-Karner's behind-the-scenes string-pulling, her behavior based marketing in action, I feel like I need a shower. It's so unscrupulous, cruel, and downright gross.

"You can refer to them as..."

I'm sure your followers thank you, Pandora, for allowing them to refer to Julie Tacker and Lisa Schicker as "CSD opposition leaders," whatever that means.

Have you, dear reader, ever ONCE told a group of adults which words they can and can not use? Me neither. I'm much too nice of a person to be that insulting and condescending. To me, statements like, "You can refer to them as...," are an interesting glimpse into her mind set, and that set is this: "I'll tell YOU what's best."

My favorite Nash-Karner approved title for Schicker and Tacker is, "anti-project CSD members." That's typical Nash-Karner.

You see, Schicker and Tacker, as Nash-Karner is well aware, have *always* favored a wastewater project in Los Osos, just not Nash-Karner's nonsensical Tri-W project, but she deliberately attempts to paint both of them as anti-*any*-project. Completely false. But that's not surprising. The truth is discarded as easily as a cigarette butt in the world of Nash-Karner's behavior based marketing strategies. On her web site she refers to that kind of deliberate confusion as "compelling language." I have another two word phrase I use to describe her "compelling language": compulsive lying.

"Going before the Coastal Commission in April to revoke a permit was negative because it would have devalued the permit, a permit that cost about \$20 million to get."

I can't think of one single person from Los Osos -- woah-wo-wo, check that -- I can't think of one single person *anywhere* that has appeared before the Coastal Commission more than Nash-Karner, including throughout 1998, when she [Jedi mind tricked](#) the California Coastal Commission into letting her also [Jedi mind trick](#) the community of Los Osos into forming the Los Osos Community Services District.

And that "\$20 million to get" crack? She seems to be *real* familiar with that figure.

Yes, that permit did cost \$20 million to get, *at least*. And what I find interesting these days, is that I frequently hear that number come up as an argument *for* the Tri-W project, including, and this is great, at a recent county supervisors meeting when Paavo Ogren of the public works department was fumbling around for an answer to, "Why is the Tri-W project still on the table," when he finally just blurted out, "A lot of money has been spent on it."

Yep. Sure has. So why is that an argument to keep the unpopular, fatally flawed, never-going-to-work project around today? Look, just because Nash-Karner is good at wasting money, doesn't mean her project is any more valid today than it was the nano-second after her Community Plan failed (more on that later).

The rest of Nash-Karner's "lengthy list of ideas for letters to the editor" from her 2005 smear campaign is nothing more than conjecture, most of which would prove to be flat-out wrong. But one of her "ideas," in particular, just kills me:

"They (Tacker and Schicker) have expended an enormous amount of time and energy in negative acts."

What a nauseating hypocrite. By the time Schicker and Tacker were elected in late 2004, the path of destruction from Hurricane Pandora over the previous seven years in Los Osos was wide, total, and very, very expensive.

I often wonder how much money Nash-Karner's meddling has cost taxpayers over the years. From the mind-boggling amount of staff time she's consumed, to the wasted \$20 - \$30 million spent on her two Tri-W projects, to the wasted \$6 million dollars that she cost county taxpayers in 1999 when she dumped the county's project in favor of her Community Plan that never worked, to the millions spent on all the sewer related elections she's caused, to the cost of the equipment required at all those meetings, and the cost of the maintenance people it takes to set up all that equipment, and the energy to power all that equipment at all of those meetings, and all the gas and car trips it takes for all the people to get to all of those meetings that are needed solely because of her incessant marketing strategies in Los Osos dating back to 1997, *at least*.

And the aggregate amount of people hours she's consumed during that time? That one just leaves me shaking my head.

So, what kind of combined costs are we talking about here, since Nash-Karner began her sewer meddling? If a credible source were to tell me that figure is somewhere around \$100 million, I wouldn't even blink.

\$100 million bucks, straight down the behavior based marketing drain, and she has the nerve to conduct a smear campaign on Schicker and Tacker because *they*, according to Nash-Karner, "have expended an enormous amount of time and energy in negative acts."

I told you you were going to need some nausea "medicine."