



Everything New Orleans

The Times-Picayune

Former candidate sues TP, reporter

Paper defamed him to aid rival, he says

Saturday, June 10, 2006

From staff reports

One of the unsuccessful candidates in last year's campaign for the state's 6th Senate District seat has sued The Times-Picayune and one of its reporters, claiming the newspaper intentionally ruined his bid for the office.

Arden Wells, a lawyer from Ponchatoula, contends in his suit filed May 26 in the 21st Judicial District Court in Tangipahoa Parish that the newspaper and reporter Meghan Gordon published "false and defamatory statements" against him in order to help candidate Diane Winston, whom the newspaper had endorsed in the June 4, 2005, race.

Wells finished sixth out of seven candidates in the race, tallying 258 votes, or about 1 percent of the total.

Wells' suit claims that several articles in the newspaper derailed his candidacy. In one, he claims a headline in a story about another candidate, state Rep. Diane Winston, was written with the intent to discredit him. The newspaper corrected the inaccurate headline, "Winston is only candidate to call north shore home," the next day. In another story, an opinion column by James Gill, he claims Gill's prediction that Wells would not win the race was written with the intent to hurt his chances.

Gill is not named as a defendant in the lawsuit. Wells also cites a June 1, 2005, article by Gordon, in which Gordon quotes Wells as claiming during an interview that he committed a homicide when he was 18. Wells' lawsuit says he "never committed a homicide or shot another human being."

Times-Picayune attorney Lori Mince said the newspaper will ask the court to dismiss the case and order Wells to pay the newspaper's legal fees for filing a frivolous suit.