

Report slams fair; livestock office in new hands

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A long-awaited report on a state investigation into the 2016 Kern County Fair was released Tuesday at the fair's monthly board of directors meeting, interrupted at times by angry members of the audience challenging the findings and fair CEO Mike Olcott.

Investigators for the Division of Measurement Standards Weighmaster Program found that legal documents were altered to allow an underweight pig to be sold at auction, a misdemeanor violation of the California Business and Professions Code, the report states.

The investigators found the fair's livestock office does not "follow best practices for issuing or handling a weighmaster certificate" and problems with the fair's record-keeping, paperwork and training. The report also said the fair

failed to submit for county inspection the scales used to weigh smaller animals like rabbits.

At the heart of the matter is the integrity of the fair's junior livestock auction — by Olcott's estimation the most lucrative in the state — and the fairness of helping one child while others in similar situations were disqualified from auction.

Katie Stotler, the fair's livestock supervisor and deputy weighmaster, told The Californian in November she ordered the documents be changed out of sympathy for a young exhibitor whose other pig died at the fair.

Stotler was not present at Tuesday's meeting, but Olcott announced a staffing change, placing deputy fair director Chris Garmon in charge of the livestock office. Olcott made no mention of Stotler.

Charlotte Phillips, a member of the audience



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It was a full room at the January meeting of the Kern County Fair board of directors.

who identified herself as Stotler's sister, said that Stotler is on medical leave but that she was told by Olcott she would not be returning to the fair and has cleaned out her office.

The report includes the transcript of a Sept. 29 voice-mail message, purportedly left by Stotler, that Olcott played for the investigators.

"Hey, Mike, this is Katie. Give me a call. I screwed up big time. Give me a call before your board hears

about it."

Olcott told investigators he talked to Stotler that night and she told him she had altered the weight on the weighmaster card and allowed the pig to be auctioned. Olcott said he asked whether she had told the buyer, and she said she had not.

Olcott said during the meeting the buyer paid market value for the animal, "the amount the buyer would have paid had the hog not gone to

auction."

Stotler told the investigators she had worked for the fair since 1986 and that, according to the report, "she was continuing to run the office the same way she had been taught."

Olcott read a list of steps the fair will take following the report, including offering training before the 2017 fair.

"Why weren't they already trained," Phillips interjected from the audience.

"It wasn't just Katie's decision," said a man in the audience, who declined to give his name. "You had knowledge of that (the pig) going across, too, but you covered yourself up," he said, referring to Olcott.

In other business, Michele Dias, legal counsel for the California Department of Food and Agriculture, recommended the fair develop a policy for handling events that

feature cannabis or hemp, following the November passage of Proposition 64, the Adult Use of Marijuana Act. Dias said guidance from the Department of Fairs and Expositions would be forthcoming.

Olcott asked Dias whether people could smoke marijuana on the grounds during the events. "It depends," said Dias, who went on to note the new law "was kind of groundbreaking."

Dias encouraged the fair board and Olcott to make sure any policy conforms with county guidelines.

The board voted to elevate vice chairman David A. Torres to chairman this year; board member Blodgie Rodriguez was selected as vice chairman.

The board adjourned to closed session to discuss "pending litigation (personnel action)" and Olcott's performance evaluation.

False arrest, excessive force claim against BPD likely today

THE BAKERSFIELD CALIFORNIAN

Chain Cohn Stiles, the Bakersfield law firm that has in recent years successfully sued local law enforcement agencies over incidents of alleged excessive force, among other

complaints, announced its intention Tuesday to file a new claim against the City of Bakersfield and Bakersfield Police Department.

The law firm, in conjunction with the Bakersfield

chapter of the NAACP, will formally announce the claim today, according to a Chain Cohn Stiles press release.

The law firm said it will allege wrongful arrest, ex-

cessive force and racial profiling on behalf of Timothy Grismore, 21, and Xavier Hines, 19, two Bakersfield College students who were taken into custody Dec. 5.

The two "were walking

on the sidewalk on their way to get something to eat at Taco Bell when an unmarked patrol car approached them on Valhalla Drive, behind West High School, and shined lights on them," according to the news release. "Two individuals, who later identified themselves as police officers, asked if Grismore and Hines were on probation or parole, and began to search them.

"The officers then slammed Grismore on the ground and struck him with batons, after he asked why he was being searched. He suffered bruises on his body and needed stitches

to close wounds on his face. Both young men were detained overnight."

The Kern County District Attorney's office declined to file charges in the case, however, saying the men violated no law.

Days after their arrest, the two men posted a Facebook video in which they discussed the incident, and it attracted nearly 250,000 views.

The Californian does not generally report statements by individuals or firms promising to sue, but Chain Cohn Stiles' record of such actions suggests it's highly likely a formal claim is forthcoming.

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