



La Habra Heights mayor settles slander lawsuit with activist

By Mike Sprague Staff Writer

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LA HABRA HEIGHTS - The disavowal of an alleged slanderous statement and the return of two radios were enough to settle a lawsuit filed by Mayor Howard Vipperman against community activist George Edwards.

As part of the settlement, Edwards said he had never told anybody that Vipperman had used "dirty campaign money" to buy radios.

In addition, Edwards returned two of six La Habra Heights Fire Watch radios to Vipperman.

The settlement required that other financial details remained confidential.

"I'm very happy," said Vipperman about settling the lawsuit he filed in October.

Vipperman said the suit was never about the radios but about protecting his name.

"There was a misconception this was about a feud over some radios," he said. "In reality, I never would have brought the suit if he hadn't made the allegation that I bought the radios with dirty campaign money."

Edwards said he had no problem disavowing the comment because he never said it.

"I found it easy to agree because there was a lot of misinformation," Edwards said.

Last year, Vipperman said Edwards had made the comment about the source of the money to another person.

The lawsuit was expensive for both. Vipperman said he spent \$20,000 on attorneys fees and Edwards said he spent \$2,000.

Edwards said he's relieved the litigation is over.

"We never should have been in the situation in the first place," he said. "It would be nice if somebody has a disagreement they would talk it out and meet with them so we avoid costly frivolous litigation."

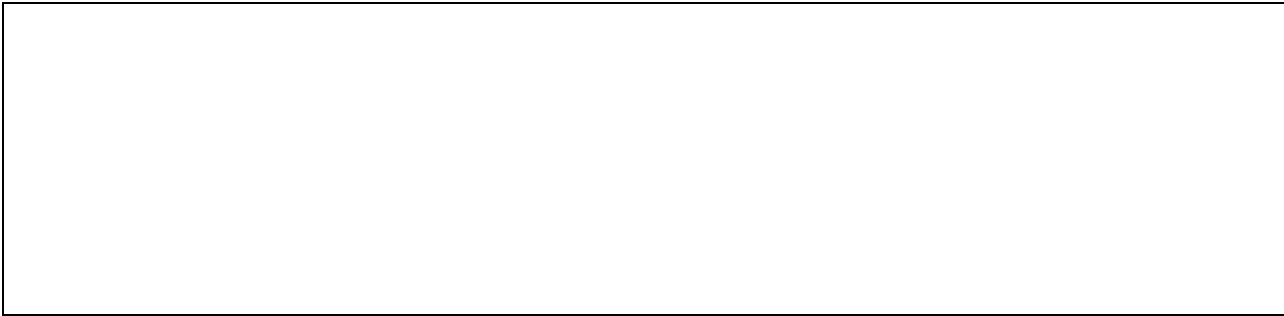
Edwards and Vipperman were allies when the latter was elected to the City Council in 2007.

Since then, they have had a falling out. Edwards didn't have Vipperman's support last year when he ran for City Council and for the La Habra Heights Water Board on Tuesday.

The dispute over the radios had to do with Vipperman in July 2007 giving Edwards \$4,059 to buy six radios.

Vipperman said he gave the money to buy the

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radios with the understanding the units were a loan from him.

Members use the radios to communicate with one another while patrolling the community to assist the Fire Department in looking for dangerous situations, said Greg Steffire, the Fire Watch's executive director.

Vipperman said he asked for the return of two of the radios but Edwards and the La Habra Heights Fire Watch group refused to give them back.

Edwards said he had understood the money for the radios was a donation.

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