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July 16, 2008

Robert Billington, President
Blackstone Valley Tourism Council
175 Main Street
Pawtucket, RI 02860

Dear Mr. Billington:

I have reviewed your complaint regarding certain aspects of a two part story recently aired on several NBC10 news shows. Those stories attributed certain statements to a Blackstone Valley Tourism Council representative, and you indicated that you believed those statements were misrepresented in the news report.

In the course of reviewing the story I also spoke with Melissa Withers, the spokesman for the state Economic Development Corporation, which oversees certain tourism related activities. She indicated her concerns that portions of the NBC10 report that related to the state's use of a Missouri "call center" were misleading.

In the course of my review I was provided by Ms. Withers with email exchanges between the reporter and Ms. Withers, written materials regarding the contract between the state and the call center, and recordings of the calls from NBC10 to the Missouri call center. I also listened to the NBC10 recording of the call with the BVTC tourism agent and spoke with the reporter who prepared and reported the news report.

The two part story suggested that local restaurants (Federal Hill was specifically mentioned) cannot rely on the Rhode Island Tourism Division for support and that representatives of the tourism division's 800 number could not answer basic questions. The story said that the tourism help line was located in Missouri, and that many of the call-takers there had never been in Rhode Island.

The story also said that when the reporter called a local 800 number – the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council – and asked where someone could find a good Italian meal, the call center representative there recommended the Olive Garden in South Attleboro, Massachusetts, and Vinny T's, also in Massachusetts.

The reporter said, "Despite the fact there are nearly 40 restaurants on Federal Hill that could fit the bill, NBC10 was not guided in that direction."

In preparing the report, the reporter made a number of calls to the Missouri call center, including a half dozen recorded in preparation for the story.

In one of the very first calls the reporter is told by the person at the call center that the center only distributes guides, that they are located in Missouri, and that any specific questions will be referred to one of the in-state tourism offices. Despite being put on notice that the call center people were not able to answer questions, the reporter made at least four more calls with predictable results: The people didn't know the answers to questions about quahogs, directions, restaurants and the Pawsox.

Before the story aired, the reporter knew, both from information she had gathered from her telephone calls to the call center, and from materials and information provided to her by the EDC, that the 800 number was for ordering pamphlets only, and that the Missouri operators were not trained, or paid, to handle state specific questions. Although in some instances the operators did attempt to answer questions, they clearly appeared to do so only to be helpful, or after much prodding.

Although the EDC says the 800 number is only for travel guide distribution, the number appears in virtually every web site that relates to tourism information and a caller could reasonably believe that information, and not simply literature, was available through that 800 number.

The EDC indicated in information provided after the stories ran that operators at the call center did not "follow protocol" by attempting to answer state specific questions, and that the call center distributes less than ten percent of the travel guide mailed out each year. The EDC says calls are routed from the Missouri center to one of the seven state tourism offices located in Rhode Island based on the nature of the inquiry.

The reporter did indicate that the call center is not equipped to answer questions, and the station did include comments from the EDC after the stories aired, but the disclosures were heavily overshadowed by the manner in which the story was both promoted and reported.

One call, concerning Italian food, made its way to the BVTC. It is this call that provided the most unflattering, negative image of the tourism program.

The BVTC worker was asked about Waterfire, and South County beaches. He was also asked about where one might find good Italian food.

The BVTC worker's first response was, "Federal Hill." He said there are a number of locations there with a variety of menus and pricing.

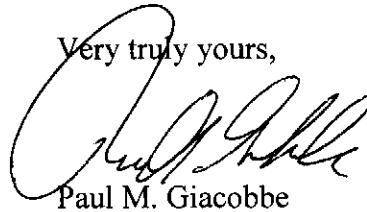
Then he was asked, "Where would *you* go for Italian food in RI?" The BVTC representative said, with a slight chuckle, "I like Olive Garden." In that same context he then mentioned Vinny T's, but quickly added that it was in Massachusetts.

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The BVTC representative *did* initially guide the caller to Federal Hill, contrary to what was reported. The BVTC representative *did not* recommend the Olive Garden in Massachusetts or Vinny T's in Massachusetts, contrary to what was reported. The representative *did not* specify a location for the Olive Garden and his mention of Olive Garden and Vinny T's was in (an apparently forthright) response to a question about where *he* goes, not necessarily where he would recommend.

Based upon the materials reviewed, the story as aired was not an accurate representation of the facts gathered by the reporter. The station's own review of the circumstances of this story has resulted in a correction and apology, both of which are necessary and appropriate.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul M. Giacobbe", written in a cursive style.

Paul M. Giacobbe

cc: Lisa G. Churchville