

Pinole's soap opera

Contra Costa Times editorial

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"AS THE PEAR STREET BISTRO TURNS," the soap opera that revolves around the controversial Pinole restaurant, has just gotten even more bizarre.

For those who haven't been tuning in, Pear Street is a popular eatery on San Pablo Avenue owned by businessman Gary Wong.

It also happens to be a favorite watering hole for some Pinole city officials and other local heavy-hitters.

The City Council has come under fire in recent months for allowing Wong to not pay nearly \$74,000 in payments on more than \$400,000 in city loans — 20 months of arrears.

The city has been taking its sweet time making Wong settle up. Some have suggested that it's because of officials' too-cozy relationship with him.

Now, this: The *Times* has obtained internal police memos contending that an intoxicated Mayor Maria Alegria interfered with police during a traffic stop outside Pear Street Bistro.

There had been rumors about the Jan. 17 incident for months. But when two residents pointedly asked Alegria about the matter at recent council meetings, she refused to discuss it.

The *Times* filed a public records request. To its credit, the city released the records in accordance with the law.

According to the memos, police stopped a 25-year-old waiter at the Pear Street Bistro for making a dangerous turn in front of a patrol car. He had no license and no insurance.

While he was sitting in his SUV, Alegria came out of the restaurant and began talking to him in Spanish. The officer told Alegria to back away from the SUV. She refused and demanded in Spanish to know his name.

The officer asked whether she spoke English, but Alegria continued to answer in Spanish.

The officer asked Alegria whether she was the man's mother. She responded, in perfect English, "No. I'm your mayor."

The befuddled officer called for backup.

Alegria went on a rant. She told the officers that she was tired of "selective enforcement" and that police needed "sensitivity training." She warned that the incident could have a negative effect on police department funding.

Alegria now says that she absolutely was not drunk and that the two officers and one sergeant were all mistaken.

Her dinner companions, Richmond council members Maria Viramontes and John Marquez, say Alegria was not drunk. Alegria says the officers misunderstood her intentions.

At this point, nothing would surprise us in the Pear Street Bistro fiasco.

We do, however, have a suggestion for Alegria:

Perhaps it would be wise, given the circumstances, to find another place to hang out.

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