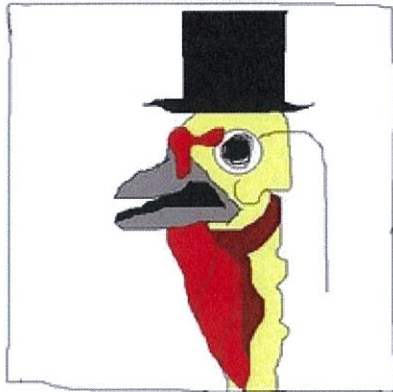


SUNDAY, OCTOBER 25, 2009

## Behind the Cowbird Curtain



We have commented before about the secret spending and self-serving slush funds of the **Chickendale Cowbirds**. If you want to know more and examine the evidence against them, there is a new website in town making public the Chamber's internal documents that show lavish spending on domestic travel and foreign vacations totalling more than **\$280,500**.

**Springdale FOI** lays it out. You can see the ten single-spaced pages of records documenting travel spending on everything from exotic cruises and Bahama getaways to a \$17.50 carwash for Rhonda Hughes' personal car, although the bulk of receipts do not specify who made the purchases or benefited from them. For example, there is a payment of \$1,440 to the Ritz Carlton on Amelia Island, and \$1,333 to the Biltmore at Coral Gables, neither of which indicated who was living large. Other receipts are more mysterious, like the \$754 Hunting Lodge for **Heath Ward**, the \$1,250 to American Airlines for "Unknown S'dale Chamber," a \$144 bill at Sam's Town for **Ashley Gardner**, and \$500 to **Christian Life Cathedral's Youth Minister Joshua Foliart** for "?" (Really, it says "?") the same weekend as Ashley's Sam's Town expenses.

**Perry and Rebecca Webb** appear to rank high among couples doing the most traveling on Chamber funds. They had important Chickendale Cowbird business that included a \$1,700 bill at the Adolphus Hotel, the Ski Train in Colorado, and numerous trips to Florida. **Brian and Melonie Moore** hauled in an \$8,600 trip to Polynesia for something that Perry Webb approved.

**Randall and Sandra Mulliken** appear to be the King and Queen of Cowbird Travel Couples. They got a trip to **Los Cabos, Mexico**, one to **Oyster Bay** for \$3,600, and Joshua, Justin, and Kelsey Mulliken went with them on another junket. Randall got over \$4,000 expenses covered for himself and an undisclosed

companion to Kona, Hawaii, more than \$3,350 for a Royal Caribbean cruise to Barcelona, Spain, and about \$3,600 for something in Amsterdam.

There is not much there about what, if anything, Perry Webb and his Merry Band of Babbitts and Bandits have done to create new jobs or save existing ones in Springdale. That's supposedly why the City pays the Chamber \$177,000 a year for economic development. You would think it would mean jobs for someone other than travel agents.

Maybe no one ever asks, when you see that Mayor Jerry van Hoose got a \$1,494 vacation at Jackson Hole, Wyoming, paid for by the Cowbirds from those same funds. We did not say it was a kickback, just a paid vacation from a vendor to a public official. The distinction would be up to a prosecutor.

More to come...