

# Hiring of GOP Chairman's Wife Smells Odd

**M**ost people are familiar with the old proverb "If it looks like a duck, quacks like a duck and walks like a duck, then it must be a duck."

In other words, if something has all the telltale characteristics of being a particular item, then it probably is and there's no need to strain for a more complicated explanation.

By that standard, if a job hiring by a local government looks like a **textbook example of political patronage**, is it? Depends on who you ask.

Questions started percolating in January when **Jennifer Triantafilou** was hired as executive assistant to the township administrator in Green Township. At the time, she was the wife of Hamilton County Republican Party Chairman **Alex Triantafilou**, although the pair was going through a lengthy, messy divorce. By the way, Alex is also an ex-Common Pleas Court judge.

Some township residents and people connected to the local government wondered why Ms. Triantafilou was hired because her resume was submitted a day *after* the deadline for applications had passed. Ninety-eight other people applied before the deadline.

Further, Ms. Triantafilou **didn't meet the minimum requirements** listed for the job, which was either possessing a four-year college degree or having five years' experience working for a government or governmental agency. (She had only a two-year, associate's degree and previously worked as a medical technician for St. Luke Hospital in Northern Kentucky.)

Odder still, Ms. Triantafilou wasn't among the top-rated candidates based on interviews with 13 of the 99 people who applied for the job. The interviews, conducted by Township Administrator **Kevin Celarek** and Township Trustee **Tony Upton**, concluded that four other people were better suited for the position.

The letter grades given to the top four choices were A+, A+, A and A. Triantafilou received an A-.

In fact, another applicant — longtime township employee **Lisa Wereley** — received an A and scored higher than Triantafilou, but she also wasn't included in the top choices.

That's probably because Wereley was one of three female township employees who filed a complaint in April 2008 against then-Trustee **Charles Mitchell**, alleging sexual harassment and assault. Mitchell quietly resigned from office as part of a confidential settlement, which no doubt still rankles his friends on the board.

(Here's how Chairman Alex described Mitchell's departure

on the county GOP's official blog back then: "Chuck Mitchell has been an outspoken and effective leader for the issues affecting *my* neighborhood for many, many years. ... Chuck brought a keen legal mind and years of experience with land-use issues to that position. His perspective will be missed.")

Only time will tell if **the township's female employees miss Mitchell as much as Alex does**.

The reason Ms. Triantafilou applied late was because Chairman Alex learned of it, according to people connected to the hiring process, only when an applicant contacted him for a reference. Talk about screwing yourself over.

Nevertheless, it's easy to see why Ms. Triantafilou wanted the executive assistant's job. For starters, **it pays \$49,938 annually**. That's a pretty good salary for anyone hunting for a job during a recession, especially for someone without a bachelor's degree.

Perhaps the most curious thing about Ms. Triantafilou's hiring, however, is **the handwritten notations on Celarek's personal desk calendar**.

Once questions about the hiring process became public, a township resident made a request under Ohio public records law for all documents related to the hire. Much to his surprise, the documents included a copy of Celarek's calendar.

Under Dec. 8 is scribbled, **"David said hire Triantafilou."** (David, apparently, is Township Trustee **David Linnenberg**.)

Scrawled under Dec. 9 is, **"Tracy → Triantafilou & job, commit political."** (Tracy, apparently, is Trustee Chairwoman **Tracy Winkler**, the wife of Common Pleas Judge **Ralph E. "Ted" Winkler**.)

For the record, when *CityBeat* first heard about the hiring and **e-mailed questions to Celarek on March 3**, his lawyerly response never mentioned the missed deadline, the lack of qualifications or her ranking as a candidate.

Also, although Celarek's response stated he didn't personally talk to Chairman Alex about the potential hiring, Celarek never mentioned the handwritten directives from trustees.

It's only due to the diligence of some township residents that the hiring's full picture slowly began to emerge. That's truly democracy in action and should be admired.

In a telephone interview, Celarek concedes that Ms. Triantafilou wasn't among his top choices but notes that the three-member board of trustees makes the final decision.

"The trustees are allowed to say when it's OK to accept applications after the deadline," Celarek says.

Explaining the Dec. 8 calendar note, he adds, "David (Lin-

nenberg) talked to me, he went through all the resumes (and) he said **he thought Jennifer Triantafilou was the best candidate.**"

About the Dec. 9 note, Celarek says Winkler told him, "It doesn't matter what I decide, **it will have political complications.**"

Exactly what the complications would be if another person was hired, though, remain unclear.

Regardless, Celarek insists he had no direct contact with Chairman Alex. "I didn't talk to Alex Triantafilou about this then and I still haven't," he says.

The chairman is out of the country until Aug. 17 and couldn't be reached for comment.

No matter, **the attitudes of elected officials here display extreme arrogance**.

A township resident said when he asked Upton after the May 24 trustees meeting whether the hiring was political, he replied, "It's not 100 percent political but, even if it's a political hire, why? Who cares?"

When Tracy Winkler's husband approached the resident after the July 12 meeting, he specifically identified himself as a judge and told the resident, "I'll defend my wife's honor." When the resident asked what that meant, the judge walked away.

Patronage — **the act of distributing political jobs and favors to friends, family or those who support one's party rather than based on objective criteria** — has a long, sordid history in the United States. Although not as blatant as it once was, the practice persists.

For example, having well-connected people on the Green Township payroll is nothing new.

Trustee **Tracy Winkler's daughter helps operate the township-owned Nathanael Green Lodge**, which has had a deficit of more than \$2 million since it opened in 1999. **Trustee Tony Upton's son works in the township's Public Works Department, while the Public Works director's son-in-law also works for the township.**

Talk about keeping it all in the family.

Now is probably a good time to mention that **every single official mentioned in this column is a prominent member of the Hamilton County Republican Party**. That's the party that always seems to make government the root of all evil and talks a good game about cleaning up waste and abuse.

Except when it hits home.

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## THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW

