



SERA, INC.'S OFFICIAL RESPONSE TO THE NEWS AND OBSERVER ARTICLE

Because of the possibility which exists to do great harm, professions such as physicians, attorneys and journalist are guided by a “Code of Ethics”. In the world of journalism, the code of ethics set forth by the *Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ)* and adopted in 1996 (borrowed and revised from the American Society of Newspaper Editors in 1926), is embraced by thousands of journalists, regardless of place or platform. While the code is not legally enforceable, it is considered the premiere resource for ethical decision-making in journalism.

The SPJ Code of Ethics promotes the belief that the duty of a journalist is to seek truth and provide a fair and comprehensive account of events and issues. Conscientious journalists from all media strive to serve the public with honesty and thoroughness. The following are a few of the basic tenets of the SPJ Code of Ethics:

Seek Truth and Report It

- Journalist should be honest, fair and courageous in gathering, reporting and interpreting information, *testing the accuracy of information from all sources and exercise care to avoid inadvertent error.*

- Diligently seek out subjects of news stories to *give them the opportunity to respond to allegations of wrongdoing. Deliberate distortion is never permissible.*
- Make certain that *headlines do not oversimplify or highlight incidents out of context.*
- Give voice to the voiceless; official and unofficial sources of information can be equally valid.

Minimize Harm

- Ethical journalists treat sources, subjects and colleagues as human beings deserving of respect.
- Recognize that gathering and reporting information may cause harm or discomfort. Pursuit of the news is not a license for arrogance.
- Show good taste. Avoid pandering to lurid curiosity.

Act Independently

- Journalists should be free of obligation to any interest other than the public's right to know.
- remain free of associations and activities that may compromise integrity or damage credibility

Be Accountable

- Journalists are accountable to their readers, listeners, viewers and each other

- Abide by the same high standards to which they hold others.

N&O Violated Standards and Principles of SPJ Code of Ethics

On August 15, 2014, the News and Observer acted irresponsibly and unethically, by printing a story on SERA, Inc. and placing it not in the Triangle section of the N&O but on the front page of the paper. The article was written by Clare Myers, a Junior at the University of Dallas who worked as a summer intern for the N&O. The intern has less than three years' experience in the journalism arena as per her current LinkedIn page, and her primary experience besides interning for several organizations was writing for the University of Dallas newspaper as a student.

By permitting this article to go to press in the condition it was printed, the N&O, in our opinion, violated all of the aforementioned standards of journalistic practice and principles of the SPJ Code of Ethics. The article was full of inaccuracies, misrepresentation of the facts, misquotes and clearly geared toward disparaging an organization which is doing an outstanding job of representing the community it serves through its relevant program and services.

SERA, Inc.'s Mission: No Change in Focus

The article starts out by identifying SERA, Inc.'s mission. The mission was created over 10 years ago when SERA was an Advisory Board and remains the same as it has over the past 10 years including as per its original mission "to enhance the quality of life for southeast Raleigh residents". The intern incorrectly describes the part of SERA's mission to enhance the quality of life as a "change in focus." On page two of a progress report prepared by the SERA Advisory Board entitled "From SERA to SERA, Inc. A Progress Report" dated December, 2009,

in paragraph two under “*Message From Dr. James West*”, Dr. West states “SERA has addressed the issue of **vacant housing, worked to expand homeownership and the development of small business, encouraged technology training for youth...**” In paragraph three, Dr. West states “SERA’s work over the past eight years has laid the groundwork for the new SERA, Inc. **whose focus remains on public safety, education of our youth, business development and improved transportation.**”

In paragraph four, he states “I look forward to seeing **healthy neighborhoods, new jobs and a renewal of the entrepreneurial spirit that has marked the history of Southeast Raleigh.** I believe SERA, Inc. is well positioned to address the tough issues **by building community capacity to effect tangible and sustainable change.**” Dr. West comments speak to the work SERA, Inc. currently engages in by working with residents to transform communities through strategic action. On the last page of the progress report noted under “Mission”, the last two sentences state “...and to improve the quality of life for Southeast Raleigh and its citizens.”

SERA, Inc. Is a Capacity Building Organization

First and foremost, SERA Inc. is a *Capacity Building* organization. For the past five years, SERA, Inc. has and continues to further the original goals Dr. West stated so eloquently in the final progress report of the Advisory Board, including our advocating within city systems and in partnership with Capital Area Friends for Transportation (CAFT) for improved transportation and bus shelters. David Eatman, City of Raleigh Transit Administrator can speak to our ongoing collaborative relationship to improving conditions to that regard.

We accomplish these goals via the work of the divisions we have set in place since the inception of our 501c3 non-profit. Those divisions include Quality and Affordable Housing/Transportation, Equity and Business Development, Youth Empowerment/Education and Entrepreneurial Training, Community Capacity Building/Safe Communities, and Health and Wellness.

SERA, Inc. under the governance of the current Board of Directors (many of whom were original SERA members and community leaders), and the leadership of President/CEO are clear in our conviction that SERA Inc. is outperforming the expectations and the accomplishments of the Advisory Board.

Community Perception of SERA Advisory Board and Issue Teams

In an Executive Summary & Final Report (Feasibility Study) prepared in 2005 by Dr. Jocelyn Taliaferro, NCSU Department of Social Work, entitled “*A University-Community Partnership Feasibility Study: Opportunities and Challenges for Southern Raleigh*”, the report shared that Southeast Raleigh respondents to the study suggested that the SERA Advisory Board’s six issue teams which included Community Involvement, Human Capacity Building, Public Safety, Commercial and Business Development, Housing and Equity and Resources development had “limited grassroots interaction with residents...Many of the issue teams were having difficulty mobilizing and reaching residents.” When asked during the course of the study what the community perception was of the Southeast Raleigh Assembly Advisory Board and its issue teams, “the perception was mixed. Some respondents were less optimistic about the ability of the organization to achieve its goals.” When asked if SERA Advisory Board was perceived positively or negatively, one respondent replied “*Somewhere between the two, Maybe there are not enough grassroots efforts.*” Others were even more

critical.” Comments included: “*All the groups in Southeast Raleigh have a hidden agenda the Southeast Raleigh Assembly is trying to do what needs to be done, but they don’t know how.*” Another respondent commented on the need for leadership development within the Southeast Raleigh Assembly. Others seemed to feel that the issue teams were important and the catalyst to getting people involved “The issue teams would know better what needs to be done and how you can get involved.”(pages 18-19).

Assessment Characteristics of a Highly and Competitive Community

Additionally in a competitiveness assessment prepared for the Southeast Raleigh Assembly Advisory Board in 2006, by James H. Johnson, Jr. , PhD and Allan Parnell, PhD, entitled “*Southeast Raleigh Competitiveness Assessment*”, the authors of the assessment described a business-oriented conceptual model for enhancing community competitiveness. Within the center of the model is human capital. The assessment goes on to describe the distinct set of characteristics that help to create highly attractive and competitive communities. Those characteristics include but are not limited to:

“Strive to reduce to the maximum extent possible, geographical racial and or ethnic, and class disparities by investing substantial resources in an array of community building institutions that seek to mend the social fabric and provide bridges to education and economic mainstream for their members, especially those who are socially and economically disadvantage.”

“Invest heavily in their educational system...to ensure the availability of education and training programs for their citizens to that they can compete for new economy jobs, thereby enhancing the community’s attractiveness to businesses.”

“Instill in their citizens, especially their youth, the attitudes, values and beliefs about education and work that are key to upward mobility in the knowledge-based economy of the 21st century.” (page 7).

Building Assessment Outcomes into SERA, Inc. Programming

SERA Inc.'s President/CEO (a doctorate level researcher and program evaluator by training), and the Board of Directors immersed themselves in the historical documentation exploring the aforementioned feasibility study and assessments as well as other historical documents that had been completed and documented about Southeast Raleigh. She also interviewed long-time residents of Southeast Raleigh relative to their experiences of living and working in Southeast Raleigh. The immersion was facilitated with the intent to learn from the mistakes, challenges and limitations faced by the SERA Advisory Board in reaching the community targets of SERA. The outcomes of those assessments, interviews and reports were the basis of discussion during the series of community meetings the President and CEO held at the beginning of her tenure at SERA Inc. and ultimately were instrumental in framing the organization's long term strategic plan.

SERA's Focus: Community Economics

As a Community Capacity non-profit, SERA, Inc.'s method to implementing economic development is achieved through a holistic approach, helping residents to become successful in every aspect of their lives and several additional services have been provided to support the holistic approach. Our model of economic development is based in Riane Eisler's model of Compassion Economics. The theory behind this model is that behind a community's financial wealth is a human being and a family.

How do you get people from unemployment, a state of under employed, lacking in skills that would make one employable, immobility, hopelessness to a place where they have confidence, feel cared for, ready to take on employment or education opportunities and begin to self-actualize? It is done exactly how we are

doing it. We look to consider the whole spectrum of economic relations all the way from how humans relate to our natural habitat to intra-household economic interactions (see SERA Inc. *501c3's Community Compass Progress Report 2010-2013*).

SERA, Inc. uses Eisler's model, in developing a caring economics where human needs and capacities are nurtured, our natural habitat is conserved and our great potential for caring and creativity is supported. Eisler has proven through her research that the real heart of economic productivity is the household, it supports and makes possible economic activity in all of the other sections.

SERA, Inc. believes as Eisler does that not only is the household a unit of consumption but it is also a unit of production, its most important product always has been and always will be people. Frankly, there is a value of caring. A standard for what is given economic value is what supports and advances human development and human survival. SAS which is in our own backyard is incredibly profitable because they imbibe a caring orientation and recognize its value. Its policies make the welfare of employees a top priority. When citizens are able to begin to disclose in a safe environment their fears, challenges and economic barriers to personal and professional success, only then can they be open to creating an action plan to change their current circumstances and transform the image of how they see themselves in order to invest in their future and financial empowerment. Helping them get there is SERA, Inc.'s work.

Long-Term Economic Value & the Civic Labor of Building Healthy Communities

Eisler's research has demonstrated that a caring orientation is not just a matter of giving visibility and value to the work of caring for children, the sick, and the elderly in households, as important as that is. It is not only about giving value to caring work in the market economy, nor is it only about being ethical in business or government. It spans the spectrum from caring for, employees, citizens, customers and other business stakeholders. Edgar Cahn calls this *process the civic labor of building healthy communities, the social justice labor of progressive social movements and the environmental labor needed to preserve a healthy natural environment for ourselves and future generation.* A caring orientation recognizes that the long-term economic impact of properly caring for a child or a Southeast Raleigh citizen is infinitely greater than that of fixing a pipe and that this difference must be factored into the economic valuation of these two activities. Thus, the impetus of our work.

These facts were made clear in the interview with the intern, it was also made clear in an interview with her by City Councilman Eugene Weeks, who serves as a guide and liaison to SERA, Inc., attends the majority of its functions and activities and has his finger on the work that SERA does every day. He spoke with her about the history of SERA and how in alignment our work is with the original mission. She deliberately and deceptively chose not to report on these very important facts.

In The Beginning: SERA, Inc. Community Focus Groups

The CEO of SERA, Rita Anita Linger, gave the reporter over three hours of her time in person, in email and on the phone to ensure that the information about the organization would be reported accurately and ethically. It was not. Please review the attached emails from Ms. Linger to the intern regarding SERA, Inc.'s

financial management, which demonstrates SERA, Inc.'s willingness to be transparent with the intern. Rita Anita also shared with her that upon her hire in 2009, seven large community focus groups were held for community members, community leaders and community and business stakeholders at City Hall to participate in programming conversations relative to SERA's new role as a non-profit.

Based on those community focus groups, it was decided the overarching structure of the original mission and its focus areas (business equity, youth education and empowerment, quality and affordable housing, technology, business development, transportation) should remain the same with some additional enhancements which included as per Dr. West's statement paragraph four of the aforementioned progress report around "healthy communities", ensuring that community members were healthy and able to experience an enhanced quality of life in order to build financially healthy and vibrant communities. Thus our mission remains the same with the integration of additional enhancements, and our cadre of programs work to support that mission.

SERA, Inc. Health and Wellness Program Dancing In the Park Receives 75% Underwriting and Sponsorship

When asked by the intern whether Dancing In the Park (DNP), one of SERA's health and Wellness programs was its signature program, Rita Anita clearly stated that it was not, but rather an important summer series for health and wellness which provided participants to other SERA programs and residents of SER an opportunity to focus on their ability to move from an unhealthy status to a place of optimal health. Because it is a program that takes place outside in a

community park, it is highly visible. However, the intern decided not to report the truth in response to her question.

What Rita Anita also shared with the intern was that Dancing In the Park (DNP) which takes place over the summer in Chavis Park, with the support and co-sponsorship of the City of Raleigh Parks and Recreation as well as some other community development conscious organizations and corporations.

The City of Raleigh Parks and Recreation has been a major supporter of Dancing in the Park since its inception and has seen an increase in the use of Chavis Park facilities by SERA's DNP participants as a result. Parks and Recreation understands the importance of creating healthy communities and sponsoring SERA Inc.'s methods of educating participants in the areas of nutrition, weight loss and cardio-vascular care, and providing personal instruction by a certified trainer in the pursuit of reducing obesity and achieving optimum health. We believe this is a great way to provide health and fitness education for citizens who cannot afford a gym membership or class.

Also sponsoring DNP this past year was the YMCA, Plexus, Wake County, North State Bank, and the Interfaith Food Shuttle. Meals for children were provided by the Interfaith Food Shuttle each Monday night and participants left with a sense of "can do" after their hour long workout and educational instruction on nutrition and health. Again the intern deliberately chose to falsely report that DNP was our signature program and simply a bunch of people dancing to hip hop music (or as she says "shimmying") in the Park and that our organization had changed its mission and was off course and off track.

While Dancing In the Park is just one of our many programs, it is responsible for slowly building a community of approximately 9,000 Southeast Raleigh residents over 5 years to participate in 16 sessions over 8 weeks to learn about nutrition, get training by a certified fitness instructor, learn how to plan meals, have opportunities to plant in SERA, Inc.'s community garden, and harvest what is planted. Our partner with the Interfaith Food Shuttle provided hot fresh meals with food prepared from their garden for children first and then adults...all done in a community park with 75% sponsorship by our supporters.

Wake County (who helped sponsor DNP this year) is considered the healthiest county in North Carolina, and SERA, Inc. believes that our work in developing a program to create healthy individuals and communities, with support from our sponsors, is responsible for contributing to that designation.

N.O.W. (Negotiating Our Way) Program Provides Substantial Support to SER Resident

Rita Anita shared with the intern that while DNP was not our signature program, but rather our most visible program, our signature programs included the Negotiating Our Way program (NOW) which serves over 8,200 people (across programs including those who participate in DNP) and includes supporting residents via phone calls and in person meetings. Staff through NOW also provide home visits to seniors and citizens who cannot travel. This program teaches participants how to think both abstractly and critically when navigating a problem or barrier so that they can better manage a similar situation in the future. What the intern did not bother to report ,although she was given this information, was that over 4,000 people initially making contact through NOW, became program participants of SERA including our economic development program.

People who are interested in starting a business, receiving coaching around their business come to us regularly for support. Just this month (August), SERA has actively supported and coached four small business owners to hone their business skills and develop a strategy to effectively market and enhance income revenue streams for their business. The intern was provided an opportunity to speak with economic development program participants, but she refused. Why?

In addition to community residents who are both employed and unemployed, SERA is dedicated to working with the formerly incarcerated who are interested in learning re-entry strategies that will assist them in becoming marketable and finding employment so they can become contributing members of their community. Our reach is vast and most of our programs are not held in public parks as is DNP, but in community centers and via one on one sessions which take place in SERA's offices.

Community Homeownership Program (C.H.O.P.) Purpose

This intern reporter chose not to report on any of the testimonials she was made privy to from community residents regarding the positive impact on their lives as a result of participation in SERA's programs. While it is true that only 15 residents this past fiscal year were approved for a home loan under our housing program, SERA does not see that as a negative; in fact we see that number as good news. There are 15 more first time homeowners in Southeast Raleigh! A strong credit rating is often a challenge in low income and disenfranchised communities. The focus of this program is more about getting those residents who are not credit worthy to a place where they can apply for a home loan. The vast majority who were turned down are now working through SERA's Homeownership program and are learning to better manage their credit and, develop a plan to re-apply once their

credit rating goes up. Our sessions on financial management are highly attended. This is a valuable program and residents appreciate our efforts to this regard. No details of these efforts were referred to in the article, although the intern was given all of them.

Real World, Hard Skill Building for Southeast Raleigh Residents

Our women in business seminar is taking place in September. Our business plan seminar this year is scheduled to take place in October.. Our Youth Entrepreneurial Technology which program graduates 40 – 60 youth a year teaching them how to generate income by becoming business owners of a web design or other e-marketing company will take place in November of this year and again in March of 2015. Each youth who completes the institute successfully, receives a laptop from SERA to pursue their business interests and is followed through longitudinal evaluation.

SERA facilitates hands-on-seminars for senior citizens who are interested in becoming more business savvy around the use of technology. Our last seminar was attended by 40 seniors and we have a waiting list of 50. There are mentorship and business programs for youth and adults facilitated on an ongoing basis and includes everything from managing credit, getting a loan, starting a business, soft and hard business skills and building self-esteem. Our workshop for young women and their parents held this past week at the Walnut Creek Wetlands (Girls on Fire) was standing room only. Our partnership with Fertile Ground Food Cooperative is moving forward and is focused on developing a good cooperative model as the first step toward a network of community owned enterprises. The intern reporter was invited to four events over the past three weeks including the Fertile Ground launch but did not show up to talk to the many residents who attended any of those

events. However she did mention one of the workshops in the article without context and deliberately did not mention that the workshop focused on self-esteem and financial independence for young entrepreneurs, facilitated by Ms. Black North Carolina 2012, who is a successful entrepreneur.

There is no mistaking that the intern's interview with SERA's CEO was agenda driven with the clear purpose of disparaging SERA Inc. at all costs. The intern went on the attack as soon as she gained entry into the CEO's office.

SERA, Inc. Serves Thousands Each Year

SERA, Inc. now has a thriving community garden, which serves the Rochester Heights community. We to date have been successful in accomplishing all of our goals as an organization. We are transparent and open and are building capacity and momentum each year. Our community members, partners and funders appreciate our voracious efforts to serve our community. We have served approximately 15,000 residents in Southeast Raleigh and approximately 100 consumers from the Greater Raleigh area this past year (these numbers include those who were provided services more than once). We will not turn away a disenfranchised resident who lives outside the boundary of SER. Our priority is to the members of SER but we serve a small amount of people who live outside the boundaries. All of our residents have access to programs and services which stay true to the original SERA focus as it relates to business & equity development, youth development, technology education, mentorship, quality and affordable housing, transportation and quality of life opportunities as per our mission.

Awards & Recognition

As a fairly new non-profit, SERA, Inc. has developed a reputation of working hard to build financial capacity. When the downturn of the economy hit, the impact was felt by non-profits across the country. Those particularly affected were new non-profits. Through the support of the city of Raleigh, SERA has been able to create a strategic funding matrix which we hope will increase our opportunity for funding over the next fiscal year. SERA is starting to receive small financial awards, and has received major recognition and awards from AARP for our community outreach work, and twice by the Perlman Foundation for our advocacy and community change work in addition to receiving small awards from other funders. The Perlman Foundation has also supported SERA, Inc. in our mentoring work with youth by providing, over the past two years, college scholarships for 9 of SERA Inc. Youth Ambassadors. We have just recently received a financial award from Duke Energy Foundation to continue our work with families around CHOP, building healthy communities, our business development work and our financial management series. We are exceedingly proud of the work we have done since becoming a nonprofit. They say “a picture is worth a thousand words”, not only do we have an anthology of pictures which captures our work across programs, but we have testimonials, reaction surveys and contact lists from real live participants which speak to the power of what we do. SERA, Inc. has been exceptional stewards of the City of Raleigh’s funding.

The SERA, Inc. Board of Directors is comprised of several prestigious Southeast Raleigh community advocates and church leaders, including Dr. Earl Johnson, pastor of Martin Street Baptist Church. They are very active and

involved board members and support SERA's longstanding mission, direction and productivity level.

All of this information was provided to the intern, yet again she chose to ignore it. It was clear from the outset that this was not going to be a fair and objective interview. She came with an agenda to disparage our organization and tried desperately to create a link between us and RBTC.

Intern Dismissed Numerous Opportunities to Speak with SERA, Inc. Program Participants and Business Partners in the Room with Her

What the intern failed to mention in her biased article was that she attended SERA's last Board and Community Ally luncheon (July 29, 2014) and heard from a diverse representation of community members, corporate and non-profit supporters, how SERA has assisted them with support on many levels in transforming their lives, and the communities within which they work. She had the chance to speak with many of those community members at our board luncheon to follow up on their public comments, but reported nothing they said in her article, why? More than one community member indicated during that meeting they were thankful for SERA and don't know how the organization is able to provide everything it does to the community. She reported on none of those comments or the testimonials she was given. She also refused, when offered, to view our position video which was comprised of actual activities and testimonials from program participants.

Her biased agenda was palpable. Part of our ability to accomplish so much has to do with staff, volunteers and board members often working late into the night and on weekends. We are committed to making a difference and have done

so. She also heard from Alphanumeric, one of the leading information technology firms in the country, who is one of SERA's biggest collaborators on the partnership to address our economic development needs in southeast Raleigh through reduced online courses which provides residents a SERA staff for technical assistance while going through the program and offers scholarships to the program of over 3,000 courses some involving certification.

Again, the intern was provided with all the aforementioned information, formal statistics for all of these programs with explanation on program blueprints and our most recent Progress Report, which shows our activity, work in full, as well as the ongoing commitment to the SERA original focus areas and mission; yet she chose to report inaccuracies and misrepresent our statistics as well as misrepresenting those she interviewed including, Councilman Eugene Weeks, Wallace Green President of RADA, and Brad Thompson.

When the intern pulled out the organization's 990, during her interview with the CEO, she did not have the skill to accurately read the 990 and had to have an explanation on how to interpret the 990 and the IRS rules around non-profit management. Although SERA provided a complete breakdown of program expenses and a copy of our audit review to her, (in totality program expenses surpassed \$200,000) she chose to eliminate program expense categories to skew her article and made absolutely no mention of the breakdown descriptions provided to her. As an inexperienced Junior undergraduate, she did not understand the concept of formative or summative evaluation, performance measurement or the process of formulating qualitative and/or quantitative goals and objectives.

The intern lives in Texas, is in Raleigh for the summer and has no understanding of the richness and diversity of Southeast Raleigh and was even

unfamiliar with the difference between the function of SERA, the Advisory Board and SERA, Inc. the 501c3 non-profit. She did not check her facts and even got the CEO's updated academic credentials wrong. Rita Anita is a Human Science PhD candidate. She has a business, leadership and community development background. She is a seasoned professional and adjunct professor, and has been helping to develop and support communities and small businesses for over 25 years. Her reputation for community development on a national level is noteworthy. All one need do is "Google" her by name for information about her background. Yet the intern got it wrong.

This deliberate and unethical attempt at bashing SERA is irresponsible journalism at its height and the News and Observer failed miserably at upholding its journalistic oath for fair reporting. This is an illegitimate attack on a small African American run non-profit in Raleigh with absolutely no basis in fact and no connection or link to agencies that are not functioning ethically. This article was a witch hunt which sought to create doubt in the public's mind describing first in the article, a black run organization which had integrity issues and then directly implying that SERA, Inc. run by a predominately black leadership team also had a breach in integrity. The News and Observer is responsible for permitting a college intern to write a biased and inaccurate story using shock journalism - this is not a valid way to do business. SERA, staff, board or program participants were not provided an opportunity to be heard in the spirit of respect and due diligence. Why not?

We believe SERA is a worthy enough organization to have deserved a seasoned reporter who was responsible enough to conduct an ethical, objective and accurate interview. We have for years been attempting to get a front page article

with the N&O to showcase our amazing work in pursuit of our mission. We were never given that privilege, rather we made the front page of the N&O on a Saturday (not even the Triangle page), in an article that was clearly designed and written with an agenda to discredit us by an awkward, abusive, intern journalist who used unethical journalistic approaches in her attempt to disparage us to the North Carolinians in Triangle. This was not even an investigative interview, rather once the intern was allowed to meet with the CEO under the guise of wanting to do a story on the “great work SERA is doing”, she turned into an attack dog and acted abusively and bully-like. Her article is filled with misquotes taken out of context and filled with downright lies.

Clearly she was instructed to write the story in this way. After all, she was an intern and had to follow the directions of someone else who managed her work for the paper and who gave the story the “green light”. We are fairly certain after some investigation of our own, who is responsible for approving an article that would be given a failing grade were it to be critiqued and graded by a journalism professor or professional editor. Trust is an issue now for us with the N&O. We will be making contact regarding a meeting with the head of the N&O and the editors responsible for publishing this article and we will ask for a retraction.

SERA, Inc. has worked long and hard to be transparent, maintain integrity, optimize resources and provide quality services to those we serve while staying true to our strategic mission. To have misguided and deceptive intern reporter guided by someone else at the N&O is unconscionable. Reporting irresponsibly in this way can cause great harm to the organization relative to receiving continued funding, upholding its stellar reputation, and the personal and professional

reputations of those who have invested countless hours to ensure the organization is run well, as well as the citizens who come to us for service.

SERA, Inc. is Transparent and Accessible

SERA, Inc. understands that there will always be naysayers who either have their own agenda to disparage good work, or who simply do not for whatever reasons educate themselves on our work. For the small number of critics (many who have been and continue to be invited to SERA activities, programming and events) who feel we are not meeting our initial mission, please come out to our events, sign up for a class, participate in our activities, read the historical documentation regarding the mission, and our announcements and reports. SERA, Inc. is easily accessible.

We have two Facebook pages, SERA TV on YouTube, and are on Twitter. We send out regular event and programming notices. Our staff attend Southeast Raleigh CAC meetings regularly and just recently (a few months ago), one of our staff had an in-depth conversation with Octavia Rainey during the Wake County Planning Tour. She was given detailed information on our programming at that time and encouraged to come out. Unfortunately, she has not.

If you are not engaged regularly, whether you are a Wake County Commissioner, business person, community leader, or citizen, you can't possibly be connected to all the good work SERA, Inc. is responsible for in transforming our communities and enhancing the quality of lives within those communities. The critics you named (primarily three), receive regular invitations to our events and activities but have chosen not to attend and have been out of the SERA loop for years. We are alarmed that the N&O, without checking current involvement or

even asking whether they have been to anything SERA has done in the past few years, created a headline based on these three critics. No SERA supporters or program participants from any of our programs were interviewed let alone from our economic development program. Again we see this as a violation of the SPJ Code of Ethics.

Program participants from the economic development program attended our board/ally luncheon which your intern attended. They spoke about how much SERA has meant to them, however, she felt no need to interview them. The green light was given to have a woman on the front page who says she has never received help from us. The woman featured in the picture never asked us for assistance. Again, you did not seek out the many citizens who ARE CURRENT program participants, the folks we are helping with their businesses, but rather sought to showcase someone who doesn't know anything about SERA and has never even called us. This was clearly done in order to build your case/agenda that we are not serving our mission and in our opinion, this among other actions related to this article, appears deliberately deceptive and completely biased. Our current progress report which contains testimonials and pictures of our work is on our website and as stated previously, a copy was presented to the intern.

Your government reporter, Colin Campbell has been on Twitter applauding the article and basking in the lie that (his words) "a government funder agency has gone from economic development to dancing". This article and his Twitter feed has been a shameful example of journalistic irresponsibility and one that was intended to stir people up. The article, the conspiring to write it and the publishing of it on the first page, is shameful and abhorrent to us as well as to a very large contingent of the community we serve. Again, we will be in contact to schedule a

meeting with the head of the paper and the editor of the article in the very near future.

SERA, Inc. Board of Directors

SERA, Inc. CEO/President