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HL: UAA PROFESSOR QUILTS AMID CREDENTIALS PROBE
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BL: By ROSEMARY SHINOHARA
Daily News reporter

LP: The controversial University of Alaska Anchorage professor who was hired as an Alaska Native but turned out not to be one resigned his position Monday. He left while the university was in the middle of an investigation of his credentials. But the investigation centered not on whether John Smelcer is an authentic Native, but on whether he told the truth about having poetry accepted for publication in The New Yorker magazine and other journals, according to the university's attorney.

Smelcer resigned voluntarily, UAA spokesman Mel Kalkowski said. Smelcer could not be reached for comment Tuesday. In his letter of resignation, he said he was leaving UAA to accept another position.

TX: He has been the subject of controversy since he was hired early this year. First, English department faculty opposed Smelcer's appointment because he was hired through a special process aimed at increasing the number of minority faculty members.

Then university administrators discovered that Smelcer is not an Alaska Native, as it appeared, but is the adopted son of an Indian. Smelcer had told university officials he was "tribally affiliated with Ahtna," a regional Native corporation based in Glennallen.

University attorney Jean Sagan said while she was checking his ethnic status she became aware some of his assertions regarding publications didn't appear to check out.

In mid-June, Sagan wrote to Smelcer's lawyer saying she had evidence he had given the university a falsified letter from The New Yorker's poetry editor. To document his claim that The New Yorker planned to publish a poem of his, Smelcer had given the university a copy of a letter with a logo from The New Yorker at the top. The letter was dated Dec. 20, 1993, and said: "Mr. John E. Smelcer, I am accepting your poem 'Autumn' for publication in our fall '94 issue of TNY." It was signed with the name "Alice Quinn."

Alice Quinn is the poetry editor of The New Yorker. But in mid-June, after Quinn was faxed a copy of the December letter, she sent the university a letter on letterhead with a logo and signature that are different from the first letter. Quinn wrote: "I am very sorry to say that the letter you faxed to me that is addressed to John Smelcer is not one I wrote. . . . We did not accept a poem entitled 'Autumn' by John E. Smelcer at any time."

Writing to Smelcer's attorney, Sagan said: "It appears that your client's actions in providing the university a falsified letter from The New Yorker may also constitute the crime of forgery."

Smelcer's attorney, Dick Sutliff, said in an interview Tuesday that Smelcer denies having prepared that New Yorker letter. "We don't know who did," Sutliff said. "There were a number of people providing documents to the university and trying actively to get him fired. It's possible one of them did it. But we don't know that."

Sagan also said Smelcer misrepresented the truth when he said his material was going to be published by the University of Washington Press in Seattle and Limner Press here.

A University of Washington editor did write to Smelcer in January expressing interest in his work. But on March 1, the same editor sent Smelcer notice that his work would not be considered.

A spokesman for Limner Press told Sagan that company is not publishing Smelcer's work either.

Sutliff said it had been weeks since he reviewed some of the material, and he couldn't respond to every statement.

The university did not complete its investigation, and since Smelcer has resigned, the matter is moot, Kalkowski said.

In 1983, when he was 20 years old, Smelcer was convicted of second-degree forgery in Fairbanks, according to court records. He and a companion forged 44 checks drawn on several different banks from seven separate accounts, for a total of about \$600.

Smelcer served 60 days in jail and four years' probation.

The judgment was later set aside because he was a youthful offender with no prior convictions, Sutliff said. "So that's really unfair to raise that." Daily News reporter Robert Meyerowitz contributed to this report.

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