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Cleveland police chief Snyder calls newspaper story 'grossly inaccurate'


 by Judy Walton
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Cleveland, Tenn., police chief Wes Snyder speaks to members of the media during a news conference Wednesday. Chief Snyder called a story written by Chattanooga Times Free Press reporter Todd South "grossly inaccurate."

 Photo by [Patrick Smith](#).

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CLEVELAND, Tenn. — Cleveland's police chief on Wednesday denounced a [Times Free Press report of a court case](#) in which his own assistant chief said he failed to immediately launch official investigations into reports in 2008 that some of his officers were having sex with teenage girls.

Chief Wes Snyder called a news conference Wednesday and read a statement calling reporter Todd South's Tuesday story "grossly inaccurate" and "totally

Follow this link to a related story: **Video: Cleveland Police Chief Wes Snyder disputes newspaper story.**

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irresponsible."

According to Snyder's statement, "Mr. South reports that I had knowledge of drug and sexual abuse by members of this department prior to my internal affairs investigation. This is completely false.

"At the time of this incident, the District Attorney's Office, the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation and the Cleveland Police Department thoroughly investigated the alleged crimes and policy violations," the chief said.

He also said none of the department's administrators "had any knowledge or participated in any cover-up as it pertained to Officers Nathan Thomas, Dennis Hughes or Jonathan Hammons."

South's story, based on testimony from Hamilton County Circuit Court, said that in May 2008, Snyder ordered Assistant Chief Gary Hicks to speak to some officers and their supervisors about allegations the officers were giving alcohol and pills to young teens and having sex with them.

Snyder's department could supply no documentation that there was any investigation before December 2008, when details came out during an investigation into an on-duty officer being shot at a pill party at Hughes' home. Hughes and Thomas eventually were indicted on charges of having sex with 14- and 16-year-old girls.

After reading the statement Wednesday, Snyder refused to answer questions, including one from the Times Free Press asking him to confirm that South had asked him four times for comment on the story a week before it was published.

Snyder did not return a phone call later in the day.

Times Free Press Managing Editor Alison Gerber pointed out in a statement that information in South's original story originated from court testimony.

"Chief Snyder was given several opportunities to comment and did not respond. The Times Free Press stands by its reporter and the information published," Gerber said.

Hicks was out of the office Wednesday and could not be reached for comment.

Court case

South's story involved testimony on Nov. 17 in an employment lawsuit filed by former Cleveland detective Duff Brumley, who was fired in 2010.

Hicks was subpoenaed to testify about the work environment at the Cleveland Police Department.

During testimony, Hicks said the department received complaints before May 2008 that some officers were giving teenage girls alcohol and having sex with them. Other complaints alleged the officers were abusing prescription medications such as hydrocodone, Hicks testified.

Hicks testified that Snyder told him to meet with the accused officers and "get their attention." He said he met in May 2008 with the officers and their supervisors to let them know the conduct

"South, Todd" -todd@timesfreepress.com- wrote:
Chief Snyder,
I am writing to request information about possible internal affairs investigations in 2007, 2008 and 2009 of former Cleveland police officers Nathan Thomas and Dennis Hughes pursuant to the state's Open Records Act, Tenn. Code Ann. § 10-7-001, et seq.
Specifically:
The types and origin of complaints/allegations that led to an investigation into the above named officers' conduct. When these complaints/allegations were communicated to the Cleveland Police Department. When the investigation began and by whom. What was the outcome of the investigations to include both findings and disciplinary actions.
I look forward to your response as quickly as possible, and certainly within the 7 business days allowed by Tenn. Code Ann. § 10-7-003(b)(9).
If you have any parts of this request, please provide a written explanation of the division, including the relevant statutory exemption for each document requested. Please feel free to contact me at 423-577-4247.
I appreciate your assistance on this matter and look forward to working with you in the future.
Thank you,
Todd South
Civilians and Military Writer
Chattanooga Times Free Press
423-255-4343 cell/office
423-254-2343 mobile
423-486-0812 fax
=====

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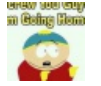
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had to stop or they would be fired.

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He said he wrote the message on a whiteboard during the meeting at the Cleveland Police Department but didn't actually speak to the officers. He testified that the officers and supervisors nodded their heads, also without speaking.

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The Tennessee Department of Children's Services website states that, under state law, "all persons (including doctors, mental health professionals, child care providers, dentists, family members and friends) must report suspected cases of child abuse or neglect. Failure to report child abuse or neglect is a violation of the law."

Records request

After Hicks' testimony on Nov. 17, South asked Snyder on Nov. 21 for records of internal affairs investigations involving the suspected officers.

Snyder turned over a computer disk with nearly 500 pages of records from the December 2008 investigation into the accidental shooting case, but there were no records on the disc indicating any other investigations before or after that.

In the shooting case, on-duty officers Chris Mason and John Hammons were at the home of Hughes, who was off duty at the time, when Hughes shot Mason in the hand.

At that point, the Cleveland Police Department began an investigation. On Jan. 5, 2009, Bradley County District Attorney Steve Bebb asked the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation to enter the case, TBI spokeswoman Kristin Helm said Wednesday. Information was unavailable late Wednesday whether the agency had been asked to investigate the case before that, Helm said.

Investigators found that Hammons and Thomas were using pills without a prescription, and the allegations about the drugs and sex with the teenagers came out.

Thomas pleaded guilty in July 2010 to drug, forgery and statutory rape charges and was sentenced to six years in prison. Hughes pleaded guilty to two counts of statutory rape and was placed on probation, court records show.



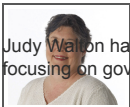
Chief Snyder disputes newspaper story

During a news conference Wednesday at the Cleveland, Tenn., Police Department, Chief Wes Snyder called a story written by Chattanooga Times Free Press reporter Todd South "grossly inaccurate."

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about Judy Walton...

Judy Walton has worked 25 years at the Chattanooga Times and the Times Free Press as an editor and reporter, focusing on government coverage and investigations. At various times she has been an assistant metro editor, region reporter and editor, county government reporter, government-beat team leader, features editor and page designer. Originally from California, Walton was brought up in a military family and attended a dozen schools across the country. She earned a journalism degree ...

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**RetiredMarshal said...**

Sounds like Mr. Scott hit a nerve here.this should be interesting and let the finger pointing begin.

December 1, 2011 at 9:21 a.m.

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**RetiredMarshal said...**

Oh I forgot something.Who in gods name gets probation for statutory rape.Is it me or is there something wrong with this picture.

December 1, 2011 at 9:26 a.m.

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**nowfedup said...**

TN/GA good ole boys clubs do NOT want "media a messing bout in ur stuff", which it seems worked well since 1800.s, but times are a changing, and they it seems, are not, or at least not yet? The whole "legal-law enforcement systems in Region need serious repairs, as in toss out and start over as most so corrupted by the GOB's (good ole boy's) they should be scrapped.

December 1, 2011 at 10:10 a.m.

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**RetiredMarshal said...**

@nowfedup:the whole and i mean the the whole judical systems need to repairing.Call me old school and I am old school.when I made a coviction it STUCK.there was no mamby pamby crap 5 years ago.If the judical system doesnt stop and take a good look at things all I can say is god help us all.

December 1, 2011 at 12:36 p.m.

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**johnnyhurst said...**

I agree nowfedup, the entire systems are almost totally corrupt.

December 1, 2011 at 12:39 p.m.

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**nowfedup said...**

Retired, if you are really "Marshall" your busts stuck, suspect you are or were as much part of problem as the Judges, DA's, Cop's etc, and the systems across TN, they are corrupted and more like tribal rule then Courts, But your post is amusing and yes "god help us all" as it seems you never saw the forest from the rotted trees

December 1, 2011 at 1:54 p.m.

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