

Daily Leader staff report

In a recent article in the Southwest Times, a three-day-per-week periodical owned by Lancaster Management Inc., of Gadsden, Ala., the claim was made that the current rate charged for legals at the Times was set by Earl Watt, the former publisher of the Times who started a daily newspaper after the Times decreased service in the community by reducing the publications days to three per week.

Former Times Classified Manager Betty Dubois, who placed legal advertisements for the Times and also left to join the staff of the Daily Leader, refuted the Times' claim that the rates were set by Watt and were, in fact, changed in July of 2008, more than two months after she, Watt and most of the staff had started the Daily Leader.

"We were charging \$4.90 when we left April 30, 2008," Dubois said.

In researching rates to bid for the official newspaper for the city, Dubois noticed the rate the Times was charging was no longer \$4.90 but, in fact, \$6.53.

This increase was discovered by local attorney Steve Brooks, and in an Aug. 7 letter to the Times, Brooks said he had noticed that the legal notices were "larger and more spread out" than they had been before and said he "sincerely hope(d) that is not what you are using to calculate the costs of the ads."

But invoices to the City of Liberal also showed the same \$6.53 charges, a 33 percent increase in costs.

According to Kansas statute 28-137, a newspaper cannot increase its rate in any given year for legal notices by more than 15 percent from the previous year.

In a response to Brooks, then Times Publisher Larry Reynolds said the higher rate was not an increase but a simple shift from an eight- column format to a six-column format.

In an example to Brooks, Reynolds stated that an ad with the same height would cost less on a six column format rather than an eight column format.

But he did not explain that an ad converted to an eight-column format also uses less height, and therefore costs less.

Reynolds also told Brooks that Times personnel “had undercharged for in-column legal advertising for years ...”

While the Times claimed it was not a rate increase, Brooks realized an increase in the costs of his billing from the Times.

Brooks received a refund for the overcharges.

The Daily Leader has no record that the City of Liberal, Seward County, USD No. 480 or any other law office required to publish legal publications received a similar refund.

The Daily Leader offers an eight-column classified format, giving customers more options in sizing which results in lower charges.