

# Los Angeles Times

## Editor Draws Tribe's Wrath

By Glenn F. Bunting, Times Staff Writer

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**SANTA YNEZ, Calif.** — Andy Rose says he had no idea that lambasting the Chumash Indians over the management of their casino could cost him his job.

In a column in the Santa Barbara News-Press, Rose chastised tribal chairman Vincent Armenta for directing a blackjack dealer to provide free chips for Armenta's then-18-year-old son and other patrons.

"Kind of takes the sport out of it, doesn't it?" Rose wrote in his Jan. 14, 2003, column.

Rose, then the paper's city editor, went on to say that tribal leaders "thumb their noses" at local government regulations, rake in huge sums of money while "nobody watches to make sure everything's legal," and cry "racism" whenever they are criticized.

Rose closed by invoking a character from the movie "Casino," a mobster who is dealt a losing hand and responds by tossing a card in the dealer's face and demanding a new one.

Leaders of the Chumash tribe say they would have ignored such an attack years earlier. This time, they fought back, demanding an apology, branding Rose a "racist" and urging his dismissal during a meeting with the executive editor.

"There's been an increasing bias in the media against gaming tribes," said Frances Snyder, a Chumash spokeswoman who attended the meeting. "We will continue to raise concerns whenever we see it."

The meeting with then-executive editor Jerry Roberts occurred about a week after Rose's column ran. Within two weeks, Rose resigned under pressure. Roberts then disowned the column, writing that it "failed to meet our own standards."

Rose, 47, who is on leave from a part-time job at a Salinas radio station, said: "I think it is pretty obvious that the Chumash had something to do with my termination."

In a past dispute with the News-Press, the tribe had withdrawn its casino advertising. Roberts said concerns over advertising played no role in Rose's departure.

He said Rose was forced out for reasons unrelated to the column on the Chumash. Roberts, now editor and publisher of the News-Press, declined to elaborate.

Rose joined the Santa Barbara paper in July 2001. He had previously been an editor and reporter for the Los Angeles Times. While serving as city editor of the News-Press, he wrote a twice-weekly opinion column.

The one that angered the tribe focused on a Dec. 7, 2002, incident. After losing nearly \$2,000, Armenta instructed the dealer to provide free blackjack chips. Armenta's son and other patrons then played with house money, costing the casino about \$1,400.

Armenta later apologized to the tribe for "a gross error in judgment" and reimbursed the casino.

Rose said that on Feb. 4, 2003, News-Press management told him he could resign with severance pay or be fired.

Roberts' article appeared on Feb. 13. The headline: "One strong opinion not shared by paper." Roberts called Rose's column "an error in editorial judgment" and said it should have been labeled clearly as the author's personal opinion.

Roberts also apologized for Rose's "factual error" in asserting that "nobody watches" over the casino. He emphasized "that neither the News-Press nor the column stated, implied or concluded that Mr. Armenta broke the law."

Roberts did not disclose in his article that Rose had been forced to resign. Roberts later said he withheld the information "since there was no connection between his column and his departure."

In an interview, Roberts said it had been a mistake to allow a city editor, who directs local news coverage, to write opinion pieces — functions that are separated in most newsrooms. "That's a bad practice, which we have stopped," he said.

Tribal leaders say they will continue to respond forcefully whenever they believe they have been treated unfairly by the media.

"I went after the News-Press because what they did was poor journalism," Armenta said. "Obviously, they knew they were wrong."