

## A Cautionary Tale

I have been editor of *Rare Meat*, our club newsletter, for at least the last ten years. I hate to have too much empty space, so whenever there's room, I usually add one or more (sometimes a whole page) of seasonal cartoons. I find them by Googling "winter cartoons" or "Thanksgiving cartoons" or something similar. I'll usually get hundreds to choose from.

About six months ago, I got a letter from King Features Syndicates, a division of Hearst Holdings, in which they cited 10 of their copyrighted cartoons that had appeared in *Rare Meat* between October 2019 and August 2021 and for which they wanted compensation. We ignored them for a while, hoping they would go away, but when they didn't, we started talking. They weren't happy with my sincerest apology and promise not to do it again. Nor were they impressed with our non-profit status and all the good we do for our community. Soon they turned it over to a law firm who demanded \$5000. Based on the recommendation of a friend of a friend, we ended up being represented by a partner in a large law firm that specializes in intellectual property. He agreed to negotiate for us on a *pro bono* basis.

Bottom line: We finally settled for a payment of \$1500. That's a lot of money for us, but only a fraction of what it could have cost us if it went to court.

How did they find us? All the newsletters were on our website. They must have a bot (a bot is a software application that is programmed to do certain tasks) that crawls the Internet looking for copyrighted images.

Lesson to be learned: Be careful where you get your images. All Google results say "image may be subject to copyright." Even "free clipart" has conditions attached to its use. If you're using the image in the poster for an event, you're probably going to put the poster on your website, the calendar on the district website, *Lions Roar* (the district newsletter, which ends up on the 20W website), Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and anyplace else for the publicity. Be aware that you could run into the same problem we did, especially if the event is to raise funds. It may be a good idea to track down whoever holds the copyright and ask for permission. It may even be worthwhile to pay whatever fee they ask; it's usually not too much.

Jerry Gordon  
Secretary, Albany & Troy Lions Club  
Webmaster for [AlbanyTroyLions.org](http://AlbanyTroyLions.org) and [20WLions.org](http://20WLions.org)  
518-235-8232

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