

New allegations surface at FAU

Writer says money used to attend festival

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With police already investigating fund raising at Florida Atlantic University, more allega-

tions of misspent donor dollars have surfaced, spurring an inquiry from FAU's inspector general.

An anonymous letter purporting to come from business college faculty and distributed to the state Board of Governors, claims that a trio of top officials improperly tapped into university gift money to attend the Cannes Film Festival in France

for "research."

But while a current investigation into whether the FAU Foundation funneled money for a new Corvette to former FAU President Anthony Catanese has sent principals running for attorneys, those at the center of the new charges say they immediately asked the school's internal affairs investigator to look into them.

The accused — FAU trustee Chairman George Zoley, General Counsel Ondina Felipe and Business College Dean Bruce Mallen — contend they did nothing wrong and have nothing to hide.

"This looks like a smear tactic," said Zoley by telephone from London on Wednesday.

The letter, which came to light Friday and begins "Florida At-

lantic University is being destroyed!" underscores continued political turmoil on the FAU campus.

It comes as former Lt. Gov. Frank Brogan takes over as president and raises more questions about FAU's reputation for handling university gift-giving. Also, it follows closely the opening of a Florida Department of Law Enforcement investigation

into whether the FAU Foundation, a money-raising operation, steered \$42,000 to Catanese to purchase a sports car as a parting gift. The FDLE has assigned three investigators to the case.

The latest contribution controversy has a Hollywood element, too.

Mallen is a former Hollywood

■ FAU CONTINUES ON 18B

New charges of fund misuse surface at FAU

FAU

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1B

producer-turned-business-school-dean with impressive motion picture industry connections and a doctorate. He also was one of the three finalists for FAU president before Brogan entered the picture and won the \$290,000-a-year job.

The letter causing the turmoil zeros in on major donations — \$3 million to date — given to the College of Business by Rexall Sundown vitamin and health company founder Carl DeSantis.

DeSantis donated \$2 million in 1997 for a Center for Motion Picture Industry Studies, which teaches the economics of filmmaking, and another \$1 million in 1999 to construct a pavilion at the university.

The letter accuses the three officials of dipping into the DeSantis money for at least three years to take personal trips, specifically to Cannes, at a cost of \$60,000 to \$90,000.

Mallen, also vice chairman of the Fort Lauderdale Film Festival, called the letter "beyond wrong, ludicrous, specious."

"Everyone on Earth seems to have received it," he said.

Mallen, who joined FAU seven years ago, said he used DeSantis donation money to travel the Cannes springtime festival in 1999 and 2000. Felipe said the 1999 trip began with a flight to Spain, where Mallen was invited to lecture at a Madrid

business school with which FAU has a partnership. Mallen said the school covered that portion of his travel.

He said spending from the DeSantis endowment was in line with the purpose of that gift and the center's mission as a film industry educator and think tank.

"If I didn't go to Cannes, . . . I would be derelict in my duties," Mallen said. "It's an incredible networking opportunity."

Felipe said she used mostly her own money to go to Cannes in 1999 with her husband, Mallen and Rob Davis, a Business College instructor.

She said she flew there from Spain too, after joining Mallen on university-related business at the Madrid university. She said she handed out diplomas at a graduation there.

Felipe said the university picked up a bill of less than \$2,000 to put her up in a private home there, she said.

FAU was host of a reception at the film festival with then-Florida Secretary of State Katherine Harris and the Fort Lauderdale Film Festival, she said. One purpose of the trip was to focus film industry attention on Florida and to encourage more movie-making here.

"I really don't know why [it's an issue now]," Felipe said. "The timing is strange."

Zoley said he traveled to Cannes in 2000 but recalls paying the bulk of his film festival tab — everything, he said, but meals — out of his own pocket.

None of the accused said they knew who generated the letter. Felipe said when she got wind of the letter, she immediately asked FAU Inspector General Morley Barnett to investigate whether she, Zoley or Mallen did anything wrong.

Zoley said the letter was delivered to the state university system governing board by John Temple, who preceded Zoley as chairman of the trustees. Temple said he didn't author the letter and didn't know who might have, but he defended circulating it to the statewide board he sits on.

"I think [they] ought to know about that," Temple said.

Some university sources say the letter may be retaliation against Zoley and other administrators' decision to impound FAU Foundation records to get to the bottom of stubborn Corvette rumors. That initially caused 28 people to be sent home on paid leave. Among the eight still barred from returning is Carla Coleman, FAU's chief fund-raiser. Asked about the letter, Coleman's attorney, Kenneth Lipman, said, "Carla is not part of it."

"Obviously, there are internal fights going on between certain people in the foundation and in the university," Lipman said.

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