

One ringie dingie. Two ringie dingies.



"Hello, this is Ernestine from the phone company. You've been very naughty, haven't you – making all those phone calls. According to my records you have racked up over \$3,200 in phone bills for the past year. Your bill for May was \$224.55 and April was \$193.12. Whom are you calling? Yes, the phone company has the right to know. Well, I have the right to know. I don't care who you are. You're the Mayor of where? No I've never heard of it. Oh the City will pay the phone bills. Well that's all right then (snort, snort). Goodbye."

That's what we need, Lily Tomlin on the case of the "out of this world" phone bill. Mayor Tatarka averaged over \$250 a month on cell phone expenses during the fiscal year of 2001-02, while the other four council members combined average totaled \$212. That's a lot of talk on San Ramon's nickel. Maybe Ernestine doesn't have the right to know to whom these phone calls were made, but San Ramon residents do. Tatarka reportedly said she didn't know how high her phone bills were and had never seen copies of them.

It seems too easy for Mayor Tatarka to let these expenses pile up. I didn't make an issue out of Tatarka's trips to Mayor's conferences because I thought they were beneficial to the City. Travel expenses of a few thousand dollars to the Mayor's conference in Washington, DC didn't seem excessive, and all the other Mayors in the area were going too. Criticism increased with the trip to the Mayor's conference in Madison, WI. Janet Lockhart of Dublin didn't go to that one, and Tatarka didn't mention it in advance. I can understand not complying with the ordinance requiring pre-approval by the City Council for out of state travel for the first trip, but not for the second. By then Tatarka should have known better. But OK, it was still City business. Criticism arose in some quarters about including her husband's dinners on her expense account, but again there were some fuzzy areas about whether or not that was reimbursed.

But the phone bills are rather blatant. How much can somebody talk! The City has per diem limits on travel expenses. Maybe we should have per diem limits on phone bills and other Council expenses. Thirty-two hundred dollars in a \$64 million dollar budget isn't a lot of money, but these costs add up. And Councilmembers shouldn't be abusing them. Or as Ernestine would say, "snort, snort!"