

# the ordinary guy

Column by Mark A. Walters  
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Perpetrator: Mr. Christian Trejbal and the editors of *The Roanoke Times*

The column was entitled *Shedding Light on Concealed Handguns* and it ran in *The Roanoke Times* on March 11th, 2007. Big deal; lots of ignorant, anti-gun columnists print rubbish every day and it tends to roll right off of me like a bead of water on a freshly waxed big, red Dodge Ram pickup truck with a Hemispherical engine. What made this anti-gun column any different and why should I care about a rogue columnist based out of the New River Valley of Virginia? I mean, what damage can a local newspaper covering the sparsely populated Appalachian mountain area of Virginia really do that someone like Sarah Brady hasn't already attempted? You may be surprised!

Mr. Trejbal, the editorial writer of the above entitled column, under the guise of "sunshine week," took it upon himself to include in his editorial a URL link to the entire database of every law-abiding Virginian with a concealed carry permit. It included the name and address of every citizen, approximately 135,000 strong, who has a permit to carry a gun

## THE ROANOKE TIMES SPARK THE GRASSROOTS

*An Interview with Mr. Philip Van Cleave of the Virginia Citizens Defense League (VCDL)*

in Virginia. The decision to print the link to the database was approved by the senior staff at *The Roanoke Times*; and for approximately one and a half days, anybody who wanted to could search the database and fish for whomever they wanted to see.

Like many of you, I was absolutely infuriated. Why? I no longer live in Virginia and my name wasn't on the list. Why should I care? For that matter, why should anyone who doesn't live in Virginia and whose name does not appear on that list give a rats tail that Mr. Trejbal and his employers would advertise that information? Okay, I'll admit that I still have some nostalgic fondness for the New River Valley. I graduated from Radford University, located right in the heart of that valley, and I have many friends residing throughout the state of Virginia. My sister and her family live in Northern Virginia and there is no doubt that if I still lived there, my name would have appeared on that list. But that's not the worst part. What lit my fire that day was the tactics used by the left to go after what they disagree with. *The Roanoke Times* is a well-known liberal newspaper with a full-blown leftist tilt. No surprise there, but when one sees the first amendment abused to attack the second amendment, it is an affront to all gun owners nationwide...You and I, regardless of where we call home, have a dog in this fight.

On the USCCA website, the discussion board heated up and many of you responded with the same anger and fury as I did. And believe me; the *Roanoke Times* felt the heat. That afternoon, I placed a call to Mr. Philip Van Cleave, president of the Virginia Citizens Defense League (VCDL), and was surprised that he was able to get back to me as quickly as he did with this firestorm erupting in his front yard. Mr. Van Cleave was

astounded at what he was witnessing from the grassroots. The following is a discussion with him about why this issue erupted like it did and what it means to all of us as gun owners and carry permit holders.

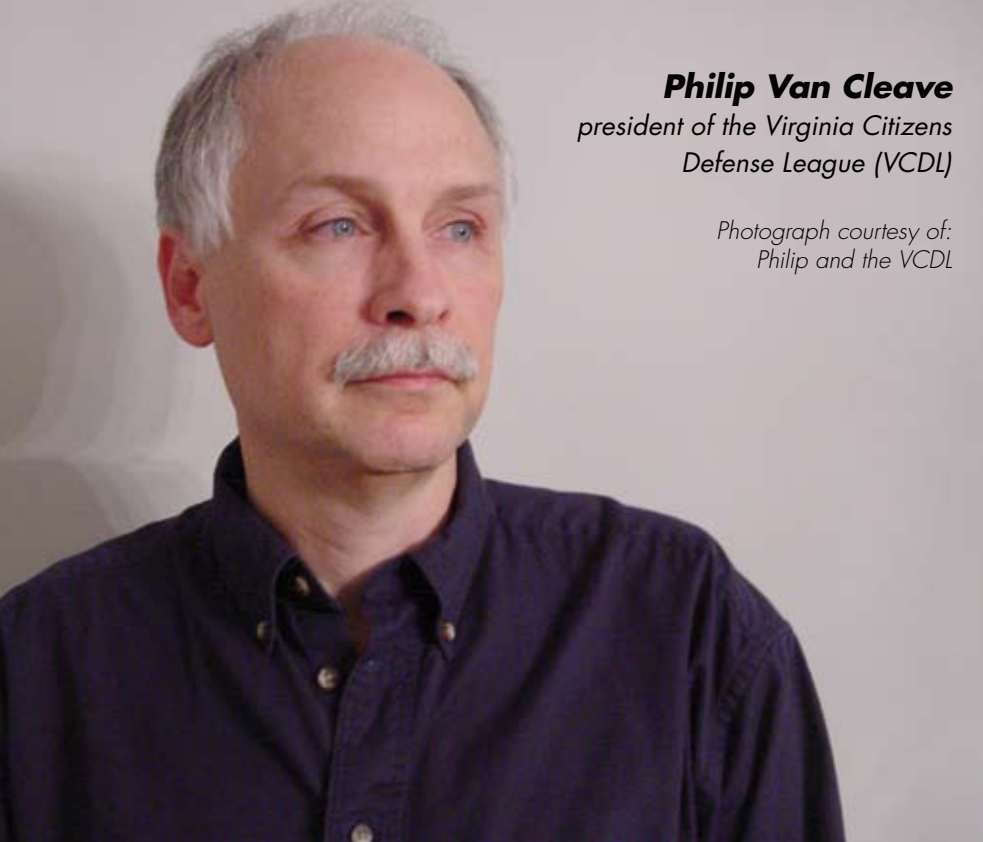
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*Hi Phil. Thank you for taking the time to speak to the readers of Concealed Carry Magazine. As president of the Virginia Citizens Defense League (VCDL), can you give us some history and background on your grassroots organization and its goals and accomplishments?*

VCDL was originally formed as the Northern Virginia Citizens Defense League (NVCDL) back in the fall of 1994. At that time, one key gun organization was saying that Virginia would not get 'shall-issue' until the republicans controlled the General Assembly. (Both the House and Senate were controlled by the democrats.) So they were willing to accept the status quo (discriminatory 'may-issue') until after the elections (which, as history shows, did not deliver the General Assembly into the hands of the republicans). Because of horrible inequities in issuing those permits [for example some counties wouldn't issue to women, others wouldn't issue to minorities, some would issue to anybody that asked, and others only to a judge's friends] NVCDL was formed by Paul Moog to get the law changed to 'shall-issue,' regardless of whether other groups thought it possible or not.

NVCDL experienced enormous growth in membership statewide and

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**Philip Van Cleave**  
president of the Virginia Citizens  
Defense League (VCDL)

Photograph courtesy of:  
Philip and the VCDL

was incorporated as VCDL in May 1998 (dropping the word 'Northern' from its name). We started with 5 members in the fall of 1994 and now have over 3,300 members. In addition, we have over 6,000 subscribers to our free VA-ALERT e-mail system.

VCDL believes that to win the fight to restore our rights, we have to go on the offensive and make use of the best lobbyist, the voter. VCDL rejects the approach of focusing on a defensive battle until 'the time is right.' Even if you win 95% of the defensive battles, you lose 5%. Over time, this defensive war of attrition slowly whittles away our rights until we have none. The time isn't going to magically become right to introduce pro-gun legislation. Instead, we have to make the time right. And we do that by constantly pushing a pro-gun agenda: getting pro-gun legislation before the General Assembly, getting voters to contact their legislators, and hounding any locality that violates the law. Even if we win only 5% of our pro-gun agenda each year, we are advancing our rights each and every year, instead of losing them bit by bit.

VCDL doesn't have a paid lobbyist. Instead, we rely upon the voters in each legislative district to contact their legislators. Voters are very effective lobbyists that legislators do listen to. VCDL has been a key player in getting many of Virginia's pro-gun laws passed

and anti-gun bills defeated. For example, it was a bill put in on our behalf that gave Virginia full firearms preemption, wiping out all local gun control except for discharge and hunting regulations back in 2004.

VCDL serves as a watchdog against localities violating the rights of gun owners. In 1999, Fairfax County enacted an administrative rule banning guns in all their government buildings, which was not allowed under Virginia law. We took them to court and won handily, with the judge ordering them to remove the 'No guns' signs. Fairfax lost so badly that they didn't even appeal. We have taken on police abuse of gun owners, most recently in Manassas, Virginia where eight officers pressured a restaurant owner to kick out seven gun owners who were peacefully enjoying a meal. The gun owners were openly carrying their handguns, as is the law in Virginia when in an establishment that serves alcohol for on-premise consumption. The police didn't like that the gun owners knew Virginia laws better than they did and sought vengeance by getting the gun owners publicly removed.

Over 150 angry VCDL members and supporters showed up at the next Manassas City Council meeting and politely, but firmly asked City Council to fire at least three of those officers. The Mayor said at the start of the meeting that he had never seen so many people show

up for a City Council meeting. In fact, he had to get the fire marshal to make an exception to allow all those people in the meeting room at one time! Video of many of the VCDL members speaking at that city council meeting are on the VCDL website at: <http://www.vcdl.org/Tonys/mcpd.html>

VCDL has a *Petition for Rule Making* in front of the Department of the Interior, asking the DOI to allow gun owners to carry in national parks for self-defense, as long as the state where the park is located allows such carry. See: <http://www.vcdl.org/index.html#PRM>

VCDL has also been protecting Virginia gun dealers from the frivolous lawsuits that New York City Mayor, Michael Bloomberg, has brought against them. As I write this, we are getting major press on VCDL's "Bloomberg Gun GiveAway," which is a drawing for a free firearm. To participate in the drawing, all one has to do is spend \$100 in any of three gun stores in Virginia. Unfortunately, the drawing is going to be over by the time that your readers see this. Depending on what happens down the road, we may have another such drawing. VCDL also has a legal defense fund for the dealers under attack by Bloomberg. You can contribute by going to our web site at <http://www.vcdl.org/index.html#DefenseFund>. For a grassroots gun organization of all volunteers, we have been busy.

*On March 11th, 2007, "The Roanoke Times" ran an editorial written by Mr. Christian Trejbal, an editorial writer for their "New River Valley Bureau," entitled "Shedding Light on Concealed Handguns," in which they published the list of Virginia's concealed carry permit holders. The backlash on the USCCA website was enormous. What kind of reaction did your organization get that day?*

In the 12 years I have been involved with VCDL, I have never seen anything even close to that reaction. I received around 700 emails and 30 phone calls in a single day asking VCDL to help shut down that database. The passion and anger from gun owners over what *The Roanoke Times* did was something to behold.

Besides just everyday permit holders, I received calls from police officers and federal forensic experts who were on that list and had many criminal enemies. Many calls were from females who

were distraught over their safety being compromised. One had been stabbed eight times by a previous husband (who is now in prison) and her ex-in-laws wanted vengeance against her. Now they might know where she lives.

*Can you tell our readers what action you took or threatened to take that day against the "Times" and the editorial writer?*

Our first action was to notify our VA-ALERT subscribers of the situation, and we told them to contact the newspaper. Next, we created a list of the various ways we could respond and ran it by our legal advisory committee, consisting of several lawyers.

Proposed responses included:

1. hiring a private investigator to get as much personal information as possible on the columnist who wrote the story, as well as the management of *The Roanoke Times* who approved the publishing of the CHP database, and put it out all over the internet.

2. contacting the major advertisers of *The Roanoke Times* via a huge email campaign and asking those advertisers

to tell *The Roanoke Times* to issue a formal apology to gun owners and to fire the columnist and the president of the paper.

3. picketing the major advertisers to get them to withdraw from advertising in *The Roanoke Times*.

4. possible legal action based on the paper releasing information on people that are specially protected by the law, including those who have testified in court against dangerous criminals.

The last option seems the hardest to do at this time. The first three are in preparatory stages as I write this.

*Has any of the newspaper staff attempted to contact you, or were you able to speak to anyone at the paper directly?*

I was interviewed at length by one of the paper's reporters. He was very interested in how VCDL planned to respond to his paper. Other than that one reporter, we have not had direct contact with the paper.

*Like you, I am fed up with this type of reporting and these tactics used by*

*the opponents of freedom and more specifically, our Second Amendment rights. What is the VCDL doing to stop this from happening again?*

We are currently pressuring two smaller papers to stop printing the names of local people who are getting new permits. In addition, we are looking at legislative options to prevent such information from being published.

*"The Roanoke Times" is a well known liberal paper with a full tilt leftist agenda. Do you believe that this was done with malicious intent against the law-abiding citizens of Virginia by the editorial staff?*

Absolutely. Since the article was on sunshine laws, which are about open government and have nothing to do with individuals, they should have stopped at just getting the list. That was proof enough that Virginia's sunshine laws are working. Instead, they took that extra step of publishing a searchable database. *The Roanoke Times* even quoted a Virginia State Police spokeswoman as saying about the list, "It is up to the recipient

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of that information to be a responsible guardian of the information." There is no doubt in my mind that *The Roanoke Times* was NOT a responsible guardian of the information and that what they did was malicious and mean spirited.

*The "Times" claimed that they pulled the list down after they were made aware that some of the names on the list were made public in violation of Virginia law. They then attempted to blame the Virginia State Police for not redacting the names that shouldn't have been on the list. Has there been any feedback from the state police regarding this incident?*

We have not been contacted by the state police about this. However, *The Roanoke Times* is attempting to shift the blame to the VSP for the paper's irresponsible actions. That's a lot like blaming the gun instead of the criminal.

*Of course you and I both know that this list has exposed the names of employees, those under protective court orders, and law enforcement officials, among many other good people. To your knowledge, has any harm come to the folks whose names were made public?*

One parole officer contacted me and said that three parolees have shown up at his house this week! Each one admitted that he got the officer's address from that database. One of those parolees showed up at his door while he was at work and just his wife and child were at home. A few days after that list came out, another gun owner (who had a collection of over 200 guns) was found murdered in his home. A connection? We don't know yet, but that is very, very suspicious.

*This was a personal issue for me, as I graduated from college in the New River Valley. I have family residing in Virginia and spent many years as a resident of Virginia. I have many friends who had their privacy invaded as a result of the irresponsibility of Mr. Trejbal and the Roanoke Times, but there is more to this than a personal vendetta. This story has national implications for ALL gun owners. For example, can you tell us why this incident matters to someone living in Kansas, Florida or Arizona?*

Sure. The anti-gun press is always looking for an angle to poke gun owners in the eye. If *The Roanoke Times* had succeeded in keeping that database online, then other papers would have

been encouraged to pull the same trick in their state. The onslaught of angered gun owners here in Virginia might deter other papers, but there is no guarantee.

*As a final thought, it appears that Mr. Trejbal and "The Roanoke Times" bit off a little more than they were willing to chew with their despicable decision and underhanded scheme to expose their law-abiding neighbors to every criminal element not only in Virginia, but in the entire nation. After feeling the wrath of gun owners nationwide, do you think they regret their decision?*

Oh, you bet they do! While newspapers like controversy, as it sells more papers, this was in a different category. People were furious at the paper itself, and in huge numbers. On one of *The Roanoke Times'* own polls, 98% of respondents were against what the paper did! In the hundreds and hundreds of emails the paper printed in response to that article, I didn't see a single one saying that the paper did the right thing. Papers are struggling in the age of the internet and can ill afford this kind of massive disapproval of their actions.

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My heartfelt thanks to Phil for his time, which has been well spent with Fox News, numerous local papers and national publications, as well as a recent appearance on CNN with Paula Zahn to discuss this very issue.

Needless to say, *The Roanoke Times* pulled the list within 2 days of its publication, claiming that they were trying to verify information contained on the list from the Virginia State Police. *The Roanoke Times* has since issued an apology for its shoddy handling of such sensitive data, albeit a weak one, but an apology nonetheless. Hopefully, *The Roanoke Times* has learned a valuable lesson, one that I hope all politicians running in 2008 were paying close attention to as well: that we as gun owners will not sit idly by and be taken advantage of simply because we are gun owners. We must remember that the enemies of freedom will use whatever dirty, underhanded schemes that are at their disposal, and it remains our responsibility to remain vigilant. The VCDL is not lying down on this, and during subsequent conversations with Mr. Van Cleave, he has assured me that

they will relentlessly pursue this until they are satisfied with the results, rather than when *The Roanoke Times* decides that it should go away.

Mr. Trejbal and the staff at the *Times* will never understand that what they have done is wrong. For all of their elitist smugness and (like most ideologues), they can not see past their own agendas, but when we rose to the occasion as one voice, they knew that we meant business. As Mr. Van Cleave said to me during one of our phone calls, "Imagine what we could accomplish together if we reacted like **this** during every election cycle." Something tells me that we're going to find out in 2008!

The Virginia Citizens Defense League can be reached at [www.vcdl.org](http://www.vcdl.org).

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Subsequent to this column being written, the nation's deadliest mass murder occurred at the Virginia Tech Campus in the heart of the new River Valley of Virginia...Literally down the street from Mr. Trejbal. I have reviewed *The Roanoke Times* editorial coverage during the two days since the shootings and the two days before this column went to print. I am quite relieved to see that the paper's editorial coverage has actually been fair during the 48 hours since this murderous, whack-job took so many lives. I will continue to monitor the *Times'* editorials and report at a later date.

I ask all of you to support the VCDL right now as Mr. VanCleave and his organization will no doubt be fighting an onslaught of knee-jerk reaction directed at law-abiding Virginians.

***My deepest prayers and thoughts go out to the families and victims of the Virginia Tech tragedy.*** 

Mark is the director of Gun Safety Education and a NRA Certified Instructor in three disciplines. He is the owner of 45 Caliber Transfer, LLC and 45 Caliber Transportation, Inc as well as a Second Amendment activist in his home town. Mark is a member of the Professional Outdoor Media Association (POMA) and the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF). He encourages readers to contact him at:

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