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KPFA Chief Steps Down After Troubled Reign By SUZANNE LA BARRE Special to the Planet

Amid a flurry of controversy, KPFA-FM General Manager Roy Campanella II has stepped down.

The radio station chief, son of Brooklyn Dodger Hall of Famer Roy Campanella, submitted his resignation late last week, on the heels of reports that KPFA's 24-member Local Station Board (LSB) voted to terminate his employment. Several board members cited a confidentiality gag in declining to confirm the verdict or whether it directly precipitated Campanella's retreat.

However, some active in the KPFA community said they expected KPFA's parent company, the Pacifica Foundation, to shed light on the matter in coming weeks.

KPFA representatives called a town hall meeting in San Francisco on Sunday to tackle escalating concerns over the conflict at the listener-supported radio station, a meeting Campanella was expected to attend. But the embattled boss, whose tenure has been marred by allegations of sexual harassment and abusive behavior—charges that were never substantiated—was not present.

Instead, he issued a statement that included the first public acknowledgment of his departure:

"I hope you will excuse me for not being able to attend the town hall meeting," Campanella writes. "Last week I submitted my resignation as general manager of KPFA, and while I am sure this news will be the source of some discussion, I also hope your dialogue will focus on ways to build effective conflict resolution skills."

A few muffled "wows" swept across the crowd of roughly 50 KPFA listeners, participants and supporters.

During Campanella's stormy 14-month reign over KPFA, he was accused of sexual harassment and verbally abusing colleagues, allegations that prompted 78 paid and unpaid workers—roughly a quarter of KPFA's employees—to sign a letter expressing no confidence in the general manager.

In May 2005, he was lambasted for aggressive conduct, when he challenged a male employee to take a fight outside. The following month, a letter to the LSB board signed by 15 female KPFA workers excoriated Campanella for his alleged "pattern of inappropriate, gender-biased, and disturbing behavior ... aimed particularly toward KPFA's women employees."

One woman told the San Francisco Chronicle that after she turned Campanella down for a date, their relationship became "highly stressful and retaliatory."

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Campanella denies those charges, and two subsequent investigations, one carried out by Pacifica and another conducted by a board-hired lawyer, upheld his innocence.

Rumors surrounding Campanella's ousting festered on the independent media website indybay.org before the San Francisco Chronicle reported on Jan. 14 that the board agreed to recommend his removal.

Some KPFA community members were elated by the news of Campanella's resignation.

"As a Feminist Woman, I am pleased," wrote one blogger in response to the indybay.org report. "He richly deserved it ..."

Others were horrified. At Sunday's meeting, former board member and longtime KPFA supporter Tomas Moran lamented the circumstances surrounding Campanella's resignation.

"It's a shameful mark on the KPFA community that Roy leaves the station and the Bay Area with an undeserved mark on his reputation regarding accusations about sexual harassment," Moran said.

Dan Siegel, the KPFA board-hired lawyer who upheld Campanella's innocence on the harassment allegations, ultimately urged the board to fire Campanella. LSB Chair Richard Phelps said that Siegel's recommendation was based on other factors, and was not evidence of sexual harassment. Phelps declined to be more specific. Siegel said he is precluded from discussing details of the case.

In August, the LSB shot down Siegel's suggestion to remove Campanella in a 15-5 vote. But the board's recent aboutface has left many nonplused: Why the change of heart?

Campanella, a graduate of Harvard College and Columbia University who enjoyed a career as a director and producer before joining KPFA, repudiates conjecture that earlier harassment and abuse claims played into the board's ruling.

"The broad agenda for the discussion they had had nothing to do with those allegations," Campanella said in a phone interview Sunday. "That had already been dealt with."

Moran suggested that larger forces may be at work. KPFA's government is fiercely entrenched in faction wars, he said, and the GM is a sitting duck. He speculates that Campanella met political death by rankling both sides of the bureaucracy, which disagree over how much reform to press upon the station.

"This has been going on at KPFA for a long time," Moran said.

The last general manager, former Berkeley Mayor Gus Newport, warmed the seat for less than a year, before checking out for personal reasons. (Some onlookers insisted other issues were at work. Then LSB Chair Willie Ratcliff was quoted in the Daily Planet saying, "[The staff] are afraid that [management] is going to usurp their power, they're going to have a boss, and they don't like it.")

At Sunday's meeting, board member Max Blanchet said the station's crisis delves far deeper than Roy Campanella.

"We've been through two managers in two years, we need to address the problem," he said. "There are systemic problems. ... We need to create a structure so we can be properly managed."

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Moran took the sentiment a step further: "Nothing's going to change by getting rid of Roy," he said.

The process for seeking a new GM is underway, Blanchet said. The board will whittle the applicant pool down to three or four candidates, and Pacifica's executive director will pick from the pack, he said, adding that a few staff members may take over general management duties in the interim.

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