

DULUTH NEWS-TRIBUNE

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News Council decision

On Aug. 14, the Minnesota News Council decided on a one-vote margin that it was unethical for the News-Tribune to use excerpts from a letter to the editor in a news story a day before the letter's publication on our opinion page.

The letter was from Rachael Martin, executive director of Fairlawn Mansion and Museum, and was her defense of an allegedly racist incident at a murder mystery dinner. Guests were invited to dress in costumes and recite nursery rhymes reflecting life in the United States in 1918. A white woman came dressed in blackface and recited a poem called "Ten Little Nigger Boys."

Martin submitted the letter on a Friday, the day the first news story appeared. We did not publish letters to the editor on Saturday at that time. We redid our Sunday letters page to get the letter in quickly on the day of our largest circulation.

We also scrambled to include most of her letter in a Saturday news story on the incident. We believed, and still do, that it would have been unfair to run a followup story on the incident without her apology and defense of what occurred.

However, in light of comments from the news council's public members, we have decided that we will handle this situation differently in the future.

We will not use excerpts from a letter to the editor in our news stories unless the letter has already been published or we run it in its entirety at the same time.

As one council member said, "I think of the editorial page as the place where I can have my say . . . and get the chance to speak in my own voice."

We do, too.



**Vicki
Gowler**

Gowler is executive editor of the News-Tribune. Swing is editorial page editor of the News-Tribune.