

Bullsugar.org's Anti-Kevin Powers Campaign of Lies

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Kenny Hinkle Jr., Kevin Powers and Marty Baum

It offends me to see good people lied about and dragged through the mud.

The Powers family -- as far as I can tell every one of them including South Florida Water Management District Governing Board Vice Chairman Kevin Powers -- are unfailingly good people who make time for public service and serve their community, rural Indiantown, with honor.

They don't deserve the treatment they're getting.

I say this now because I'm tired of reading Bullsugar.org lies on Facebook about Kevin Powers' business interests.

Unless you live in South Florida, you probably don't know much about [Bullsugar.org](#), a 2-year-old, anti-sugar 501(c)(4) organization. All 501(c)(4) means is, it doesn't have to reveal its donors and its money can stay dark. The organization swears up and down billionaire Paul Tudor Jones, the force behind the Everglades Foundation/Trust, doesn't have a leadership role, but most of the group's critics don't buy it.



The Bulls (let's call them) apparently feel the need to hatch a conspiracy theory about Kevin Powers because the SFWMD board opposes their push to "buy the land, move the water south" for reasons I've consistently written about in Sunshine State News. Powers lives in Martin County, ground zero for algal blooms.

Bullsugar's lies first came to my attention in August, when organization president Kenny Hinkle Jr. and staffers Michael Conner and Jo Neeson launched a concerted effort to paint Powers as a man in a dirty business, profiting from his Rick Scott-appointed SFWMD position.

Hinkle wrote, "Guess who owns Indiantown Gas Co at the end of the (Sabal Trail) pipeline. None other than Kevin Powers of SFWMD. Guess Gov. Rick Scott took care of his buddy that killed the purchase of US Sugarland last year."

A total lie, I thought when I read it. But I figured it would go away after Marsha Powers, Kevin's wife and a member of the Martin County School Board, fired off a letter to Hinkle setting the record straight.

"... First of all, Indiantown Gas Co. was founded over 55 years ago by Kevin's dad, Timer Powers," Marsha wrote. "In addition to being a small business owner, Timer was also a county commissioner who served with Maggy Hurchalla. Next time you see Maggy ask her about Timer. When Timer passed away in 1992, the business was passed down to his wife & children. Today, Brian Powers (Kevin's brother) is the majority owner of the company and runs the day-to-day operations with his wife.

"Your reference to the pipeline is totally off base. IGC is a propane gas company only. The business is focused on residential and commercial propane delivery, not natural gas. IGC has no interest in this natural gas pipeline going to FPL or any other pipeline for that matter. I know you are very passionate about your cause, and that is admirable, but please get the facts before you use pieces of information that are not accurate or relevant. I am happy to talk with you any time to verify the facts."

^r Well, nice try, Marsha. Even your personal tutorial couldn't make the rubbish disappear.

Even knowing his information was wrong, Hinkle never took the Facebook post down. In fact, as time went on, he doubled down on his lies.

Bullsugar Director of Angler Outreach Mike Connor, a licensed fishing guide, "posted a video ... of Kevin along with his false, vulgar commentary," Marsha Powers wrote. This is what my children and your children get to see and hear. Is this really the way to get results?

"Kevin and I were at Dancing in the Streets when we had to walk by the Bullsugar.org tent. Kevin was immediately called out by the people working in the booth. At one point, Hinkle had strangers that walked up to the booth shout things at Kevin. It was such a display of immaturity and bullying behavior that seems unimaginable as I write it. ... Kevin and I cannot go out in the community that we love as much or more than anyone without being heckled by known liars and bullies," Marsha wrote in August to Kenan Siegel, a Bullsugar.org co-founder.

"Kevin and I were both born and raised in Martin County," she went on to say, "and we chose to live, work, serve our community and raise our children here. We are completely invested in the health and welfare of our entire community. For a few people who represent your organization to attempt to slander and disparage our family is just not OK! I will no longer sit quietly while good people are treated badly by Bullsugar.org and its leaders."

You would have thought after that, word would have circulated among the Bulls that Kevin Powers may be an Indiantown Gas Co. shareholder -- shareholder in the family propane business -- but he has nothing whatsoever to do with the Sabal Trail Pipeline or Florida Power and Light Co. or coal -- all the links to him this deceptive organization makes.

But, no.

Doggone, if the Bulls aren't Facebooking the same garbage today that they were back in August. This week Kenny Hinkle was still calling the Powers family "the benefactor of the Sabal Trail Pipeline" and the owners of "the natural gas company in Indiantown." No point, apparently, in confusing Kenny with the facts.

But there was another post, too -- this one from Indian Riverkeeper Marty Baum: "... hell, Kevin Powers, vice chair, operates the COAL fired plant in Indiantown, he doesn't care about clean water. HIS golden parachute for denying us the land we so desperately need was the proposed LNG refrigeration plant that Sabal Trail Pipeline is headed to."

The answer here is no he doesn't, yes he does and no it wasn't.

I asked Baum on Thursday where he got all that from, and he said, "You know, I'm really sorry about that, I got bad information and realized it when I went back to check. I meant to address it and apologize to Kevin for what I said."

The apology hasn't happened yet.

Nor did Kevin Powers ruin Florida's chances of completing the U.S. Sugar land deal, as Hinkle continues to peddle. The Water Management District is a creature of the Florida Legislature and leaders in both chambers of the Legislature were just as unimpressed with the deal as water managers were.

The problem is, if you repeat a lie enough times, people don't believe the truth when they hear it. But I guess that's the whole idea.

I agree with Rep. Matt Caldwell, the North Fort Myers Republican who [told Politico in October](#) Bullsugar.org has brought "a callousness to political discourse while dismissing legitimate stakeholders ..."

Callousness? I'll say. How about dishonesty?

But this is what Treasure Coast residents, desperate for an answer to their sick rivers, get -- Bull in their face, day after day after day.

Sarah Powers, Kevin and Marsha's 20-year-old daughter, got fed up enough to post a Facebook comment under Baum's and another posting by Gayle Ryan: "You will never be taken seriously when you spread lies to further your agenda," Sarah wrote Thursday. "My dad, Kevin Powers, does not own or operate a coal-fired plant anywhere and has nothing to do with Sabal Trail Pipeline. If you want a seat at the table to discuss real issues, you need to stop spreading lies and propaganda. It only damages your credibility in the community and the conversation."

You go, Sarah.

I've been acquainted with the Powers family almost from the day I started work at The Stuart News in 1977. Not so much the whole family in those early days, but certainly I kept tabs on Timer Powers, Kevin's dad, a class act.

Timer Powers *was* Indiantown back then.

It's true, Timer brought natural gas to Indiantown, and he was a hero for it. When an oil pipeline along the coast was converted to natural gas in the early 1960s, Timer's Indiantown Gas Co. hooked up to it. That paved the way for a rural town "in the middle of nowhere" (as we would say) to leave a very large footprint for economic development that makes a huge difference to Martin County tax revenue today. In 1973, before he converted his company to propane gas, Timer was named president of the Florida Natural Gas Association. It was a very big deal.

I can tell you for fact, Kevin Powers was raised to care about the rivers and the whole of Florida's delicate ecosystem.

Not only was his father Timer on the Martin County Commission for 12 years, in 1983, then-Gov. Bob Graham appointed him to the Water Management Governing Board. He served until illness forced him to resign in 1987, but returned to work with the district's executive management staff in January 1991.

During his tenure, Timer Powers helped settle longstanding disputes with the Seminole Tribe over state use of Indian lands and tribal water rights. The negotiations ended in a landmark water rights compact -- the first in the nation resolving Indian claims without major, costly litigation.

"He was so patient. He would not let us leave a single meeting without at least agreeing on one point," Alan Milledge, chairman of the district's board, said in Timer's obituary.

That sounds a lot like Kevin to me.

Timer later used his negotiating skills as chairman of the Kissimmee River Resource Planning and Management Committee and eventually helped formulate a long-term management plan for the region.

Timer Powers died in 1992 at age 55. At his death, Gov. Lawton Chiles said, "I recall a Bible verse that tells us, 'Blessed are the peacemakers.' We will miss Timer as a person and as a peacemaker. He was one of the finest people you could know, and his belief that people can work together to solve problems will be sorely missed."

I've often wondered how Timer would shovel Bullsugar.org's B.S. if he were here today.

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