

Jacob Carpenter “Behind the Headlines” podcast transcript:

cue dance music

Katie O’Connell: Have you ever wondered what it’s like behind the scenes at Summerfest?

Piet Levy: It flies by and it’s just so much to cover. But it’s—it, there’s just no real kind of adrenaline rush on the job like for (inaudible) Summerfest, ‘cause the deadlines are really tight and you’re seeing so many different things and you have to be a quick expert on so many different types of music. And, uh, so it’s a real blast; it’s a privilege and a lot of fun.

Katie: That’s music writer Piet Levy. Piet joins us with more on this year’s Summerfest later in today’s show. I’m your host, Katie O’Connell, coming to you from Washington, D.C. this weekend. Thanks so much for tuning in.

cue dramatic music

Katie: A mysterious envelope arrived at the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel’s newsroom recently. Inside were documents that lead reporter Jacob Carpenter to uncover a story about a Green Bay man who has applied for hundreds of jobs in order to threaten companies with lawsuits. Reporter Mary Louise Schumacher asks Jacob about this unfolding story.

music dies down

Mary Louise Schumacher: Okay, so Jacob, you have this great story coming up about, um, a gentleman who apparently is living in Green Bay and applying for hundreds of jobs...um...apparently to, to file lawsuits. Tell us a little bit about how you came across this story.

Jacob Carpenter: We actually had an envelope that was left with us here in the newsroom, uh, that contained a motion that had recently been filed in the case and it didn’t have any, any notes, anything left on...uh...you know, in the envelope?—it just had that motion—and so we took that, looked up the case, read through some of the other motions, and it all started to unravel a little bit as we looked through all the different filings that had been made over the last couple years.

Mary: And, and, so tell us, what is the story? What is this gentleman doing? Who is he suing?

Jacob: So his name’s Cory Groshek, uh, he lives in Green Bay. He essentially has found, uh, a part of a Federal law called the Fair Credit Reporting Act that he believes companies violate every day, pretty much.

Mary: Mm-hm.

Jacob: And so what he’s done is he applies to hundreds of jobs—almost one or two a day, on average—and he then hopes that they will violate this law, and if he sees it, he will then demand from them a settlement or he says he will threaten, uh, or he threatens, to file a class action lawsuit against them. And it’s worked for him. He’s—he admitted in a recent deposition that he’s made almost a quarter million dollars...

Mary: Wow...

Jacob: ...just in settlements alone.

Mary: So, do you have any idea how many companies he's gone after and how much he's actually made so far, total?

Jacob: Well, we wouldn't have known this without this recent filing that we got. Um, and he, in a deposition, said that he has threatened to sue, uh, I believe it was 46 companies. He has threat—or he has sued three of them. Um, about 20 of them have settled with him, he said, and that's for a total of \$230,000.

Mary: Wow. And, and what do we know about this guy? What can you tell us about who he is, what he's like, how he happened upon this particular way of making money?

Jacob: We actually know because part of what he has to do to file his complaint is put in his job application.

Mary: Right.

Jacob: So we know that he went to high school in Stevens Point. Uh, he went to a technical college and got an Associate's Degree, uh, in two years. He worked for about seven years, uh, in customer service at a, a company and then went to Lands' End for a couple years in a similar customer service position.

Mary: Mm-hm.

Jacob: And from what he said in his deposition, in about early 2014, he somehow learned about this Fair Credit Reporting Act and conferred with a couple lawyers, and from there he just found this, some people would call it a loophole, some would say that this is a, a real violation of people breaking the law...

Mary: Mm-hm.

Jacob: ...and found that this is a way for him to, apparently, make money.

Mary: Mm-hm.

Jacob: He might say that, you know, this is something that he's making sure that people are following the law.

Mary: Yeah.

Jacob: We gave him the opportunity to talk with us.

Mary: Yeah, so tell—you, d—you, you did not get return phone calls, but it sounds like you went up to track him down in Green Bay, is that right?

Jacob: Yeah, he—I sent him e-mails, I sent him—or I called him a couple times and left him messages. I do know that he heard them and read them, because he didn't respond initially, so I went to Green Bay and went and knocked on his front door. He initially didn't answer and I kinda went around to a few of the neighbors to, you know, see if he actually does live here.

Mary: Mm-hm.

Jacob: As he—as I was doing that, he got into his car and started to leave his house...

Mary: Okay.

Jacob: ...and so I ran up to his car, as he was in his driveway, told him who I was. He said that he knew who I was because he had gotten my messages. Obviously, he didn't want to respond to them, or...

Mary: Right.

Jacob: ...and, and, said at the time that he didn't want to respond. He was not thrilled to see me there...

Mary: Yeah.

Jacob: Um, he accused of us stalking and wondered how we figured out where he lived and, and how we got his e-mail address and things of that sort. Um, he took down my license plate number and he then left.

Mary: Mm-hm. Was he willing to talk a little bit, at all, about what he's doing in, in threatening these lawsuits?

Jacob: He was only willing to tell me why he didn't wanna talk with me, which is essentially, he believes that there—uh, you know, it's pending litigation, which is true, and you know, that he felt like it could somehow jeopardize that litigation.

Mary: Mm-hm.

Jacob: And he told me that. And he also told why he felt like I was violating, yeah, his privacy and, and why he didn't really want to see me there.

Mary: Mm-kay. And you can just tell us a little bit about this Fair Reporting Act, and also how the legal community regards this, this story that you're running, that you've spoken to some legal experts as well. Um, how do they regard th—this gentleman's, you know...uh...plight.

Jacob: Well, the Fair Credit Reporting Act, uh, is a law that was enacted back in 1970.

Mary: Mm-hm.

Jacob: It's pretty technical, but essentially, the part that is important here is that, if a company wants to get your credit report...

Mary: Mm-hm.

Jacob: ...which about half of companies do, uh, during the hiring process, according to some studies, uh, they have to make a very clear disclosure of their intention to get that report.

Mary: Mm-hm.

Jacob: And so this is where, uh, Mr. Groshek says that these companies aren't doing that in, in the way that they're supposed to by law. There are differing opinions on, you know, the approach that he's taken and, and some of the technical things around, uh, this type of process. Um, there are some who feel like this is a, a really technical thing that they're taking advantage of; that they feel like this is just a money grab.

Mary: Mm-hm.

Jacob: There are others who see this and say “Well, follow the law. If you don’t—if you don’t want to have to pay for this, then follow the law.”

Mary: Right.

Jacob: And so, you know, there are, there are companies that—he’s not the only one doing this...

Mary: Is that right.

Jacob: There are companies that have been sued in, in similar fashion and have paid up to five million dollars, uh, in settlements. And one of the companies that Mr. Groshek is suing has preliminarily agreed to settle with him...

Mary: Mm-kay.

Jacob: ...and, you know, for, I believe it was almost a quarter million dollars. He will only get about seven-thousand of that; the rest will go to, uh, people who had applied to the company.

Mary: Now, when companies are stung by Mr. Groshek or someone like him, do they then change their procedures? Have, have you seen any of that?

Jacob: We have—I don’t know that for sure.

Mary: Yeah.

Jacob: Um, the companies—we don’t know which companies he has settled with. He actually has only sued three companies, but he’s—he has said that he’s threatened to sue about 40 others. And we don’t know anything about, you know, the, how that played about because we don’t have his full deposition...

Mary: Mm-hm.

Jacob: ...because it’s under seal, and because there are no legal documents that are public for those companies that he’s threatened. Um, for...and so for the other three, those are pending cases that, uh, that have involved lawsuits that he’s actually filed. And so we don’t know yet whether they have or will, uh, change any of their policies. My guess is that there’s a whole lot of people in human relations that are looking at this type of thing, given that, you know, he’s not the only one doing this across the country.

Mary: Excellent. And will you continue to follow this story after this story publishes? Is this something you’ll follow up on? What happens next?

Jacob: We definitely will. We’re interested in getting a copy of his deposition...

Mary: Mm-hm.

Jacob: ...which is currently being fought over by the, uh, by the lawyers in the case—how much of it, if any of it, should be released.

Mary: Mm-hm:

Jacob: It looks like, that part of it will, uh, potentially be released, and so that could lead to some interesting, additional details in this case.

Mary: Excellent. Thanks for talking about it.

Jacob: Thanks for having me.

cue dramatic music

Katie: To read Jacob's story, go to JSOnline.com. You can also find it in today's Milwaukee Journal Sentinel.