

You might say Dr. Petrocelli has more than a BS in BS

BY DAVE YOCHUM

There was a post on one of those community Facebook pages in Cornelius where anything goes. A commenter said her “sister’s friend did see an alligator two weeks ago in Cornelius” and called 911. The sighting was apparently on Country Club Drive.

We checked in with Cornelius Police to see if there was such a call to 911—they’re recorded.



The official word back: “I am not having any luck locating a call. I have checked with our Animal Control staff and they are also un-

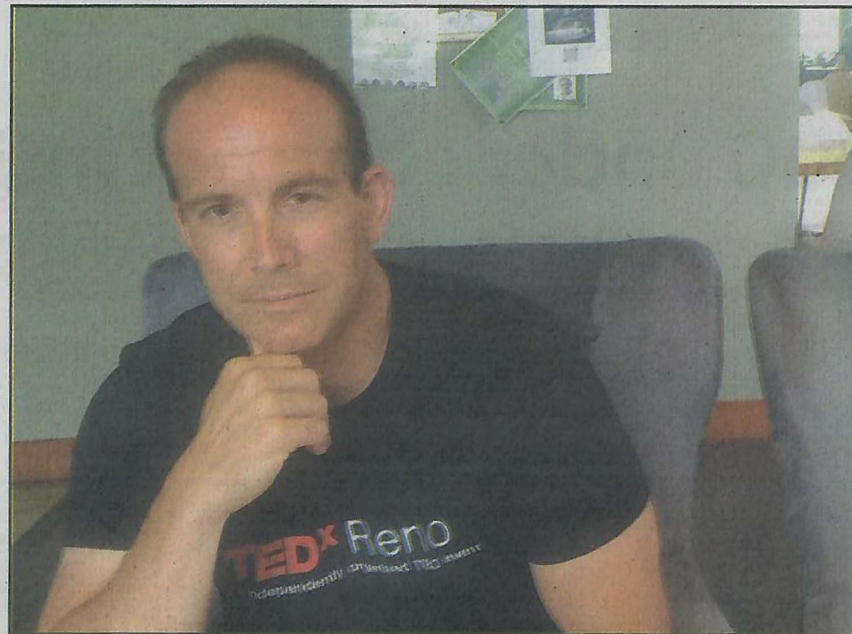
aware of a call of this nature within the past couple of weeks.”

It sounds like the post on Facebook was, um, BS. (We reached out to the person who posted; no response.)

Why do people say the craziest things as if they were true?

Calling out BS

John Petrocelli, a psychology professor at Wake Forest University, is a Cornelius resident, author and



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expert on BS. In fact, he has a new book out called “The Life-Changing Science of Detecting Bullshit.” (322 pages, \$26.99, St. Martin’s Press)

Petrocelli, who earned a PhD. in social psychology from Indiana University/Bloomington, says there is more BS today than there has ever been.

“With social media, people seem to feel obligated to have an opinion

about everything,” says Petrocelli, explaining that BS “clouds and distorts judgment and decision-making.” Believing BS can be painful and costly.

So, calling out BS is a good skill to have.

BS tips

Here are some tips from the book on how to detect BS:

- What exactly is your claim, what are you saying?
- How credible is the person making the claim?
- How does that person know it’s true?
- In what way or ways could the claim be wrong?
- Have they shifted attribution, as in “I read somewhere that...”

There are other things to do to detect BS—ask, confirm, verify, but you get the idea.

“People think BS is harmless, but it’s not,” says Petrocelli, who lives on Crown Lake Drive with his wife Lina and one daughter. “People think they’re good at detecting it, but they’re not.”

National authority on BS

A professor at Wake Forest for 15 years, he has given a 13-minute Ted Talk just on the subject of BS. In it he says people who are on the receiving end of BS often want to believe it’s true.

Last time we checked, Petrocelli’s Ted Talk had nearly 40,000 views.

- To view it, go to this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WaOiRRqHNNk> or search John Petrocelli