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Arts Council’s director resigns, cites policy rift with chairman

PROVIDENCE — Diane M. Disney, executive director of the state Council on the Arts for little more than a year, resigned yesterday from her $25,000-a-year job, citing policy differences that had developed between herself and the agency’s chairman, Daniel Lecht.

But Anne Utter, a council member from Westerly, said last night that Miss Disney phoned her Monday and said she was being asked to resign or face possible firing. “I was totally appalled, totally amazed,” said Mrs. Utter.

Lecht last night denied asking Miss Disney to quit.

Meanwhile, an “emergency” meeting of the council is scheduled for this afternoon at 4. The session was called at the urging of Mrs. Utter and at least one other council member angered by the way the matter has been handled.

Lecht, said a source, called a number of board members late last week to discuss the situation and indicated that he was going to ask Miss Disney to step down.

Council member Mary Gammino, said that Lecht told her Monday he had phoned the council and that he ‘had a clear mandate’ to fire Miss Disney.

“It’s like the Saturday Night Massacre,” said Mrs. Gammino. “I will not accept the fact that he has a mandate to run this council over the phone. I think Diane at least deserves a vote from the full board.”

Insiders have said for sometime that Lecht, president of Rhode Island Lithograph, and Miss Disney had been at odds over policy matters. It was Lecht who 14 months ago handpicked Miss Disney for the director’s job.

Michaelson decries possible OSHA cut

PROVIDENCE — Julius C. Michaelson, a candidate for the Democratic nomination for U.S. Senate, yesterday deplored a prospective major cutback in the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration’s staff in Rhode Island and sent a letter to Thorne G. Aucbter, OSHA director.

Michaelson, who is general counsel to the state AFL-CIO, told Aucbter that Rhode Island is an industrial state with a rising industrial accident rate: In fact, in 1980, the last year for which the state Department of Labor has statistics, one of 11 workers here was injured on the job or contracted an occupational illness.

If the prospective cutback takes place, Michaelson said, Rhode Island will be left with only four health and safety inspectors.