

## Vermont's Wildflower Inn Settles Gay Marriage Lawsuit With Lesbian Couple

MONTPELIER, Vt. — Two New York women and a Vermont country inn have settled a lawsuit that accused the business of refusing to host the couple's wedding reception.

The American Civil Liberties Union said Thursday the Wildflower Inn in Lyndonville agreed to pay a \$10,000 civil penalty to the Vermont Human Rights Commission and to place \$20,000 in a charitable trust.

Under the settlement, the inn also agreed it would no longer host weddings and their receptions. The innkeepers' lawyer, Jim Campbell, said they had decided previously to end that part of their business.

"We're glad that the Wildflower Inn has recognized that the way we were treated was wrong and that no other family will have to experience what we did," said Ming Linsley in a statement released by the ACLU. "Although we found a different location and had a beautiful day, all families should feel welcome at any resort that's open to the public."

The ACLU said Ming Linsley and Kate Linsley contacted the civil rights organization after Ming's mother was told by the inn's events manager that the inn didn't host "gay receptions" because of the innkeepers' "personal feelings."

But Campbell, a lawyer for innkeepers Jim and Mary O'Reilly, said Thursday the inn was willing to host same-sex wedding receptions, despite the O'Reillys' opposition to same-sex marriage, based on their Catholic faith. Campbell, who works with the Alliance Defending Freedom, said an employee was acting without the owners' permission when she emailed Ming Linsley's mother, rejecting the request.

"A former Wildflower employee sparked the lawsuit when she falsely claimed that the inn would not allow a same-sex reception," the alliance said in a statement. "The inn's actual business practice, which the Vermont Human Rights Commission approved in 2005, was to honestly disclose its owners' religious convictions to potential customers while agreeing to serve everyone in accordance with the law."

Robert Appel, the commission's executive director, said that in the Linsley case and in a 2005 case, the innkeepers said they would host same-sex wedding receptions, but expressed their opposition to same-sex marriages.

He said that in the 2005 case, the commission found that the inn had not illegally discriminated against the couple. But the commission decided to join the ACLU in its lawsuit last year.

Vermont was the first state to pass a law allowing same-sex couples to enter into civil unions in 2000. It enacted gay marriage in 2009.

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