Kentucky Fried Bigots?

A restaurant chain’s greasy AIDS stance

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A down-home restaurant chain in the South and Midwest, Max & Erma’s prides itself on charitable giving. Indeed, it often donates 20 percent of an appointed day’s proceeds to causes both human and animal. But Louisville, Kentucky AIDS Service Center Coalition (ASCC) board member Linda Underwood alleges that in January, when she asked M&E to host an AIDS event, community-relations rep Stacey McPhillips said the chain has an unwritten no-AIDS policy.

“I was told maybe we could do a fundraiser for ‘children’ and not mention AIDS,” Underwood says. “I was enraged.” McPhillips wouldn’t comment, but M&E spokesman Robin Yocum denied any such policy and that McPhillips had said otherwise. Yet M&E couldn’t recall hosting any AIDS-themed events, saying only that they are focusing on organizations dealing with education and kids. “They won’t fundraise for HIV,” says Dale Robinson, an HIV positive ASCC board member, “yet they’ve done one for ferrets!”

The rebuff smattered local media, prompting several restaurants to give money to ASCC. Max & Erma’s soon relented, granting fundraising permission, plus $1,000. Underwood refused the event, saying she’ll never eat at M&E’s again. But she did take the bucks. Now, that’s good carry-out.

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