What’s Cookin’?

Denny’s goes from family style to family feud

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Gary Hardin, who slung hash (or at least served it) at a San Diego Denny’s for seven years, is suing the chain for discrimination because he said he was canned for having HIV. According to Hardin, an openly gay PWA, he got the boot when a homophobic manager came on board. When he told the new boss that he was positive, Hardin said the head honcho demanded he show his meds to prove it. When Hardin reluctantly complied, the manager allegedly “lined them up on the front counter in full view of everyone.”

But the restaurant claimed it fired Hardin because he refused to wait on minority customers. Three years ago, the “family style” joint coughed up $46 million to settle claims that it denied service to African-American patrons. Consequently, any employee who discriminates can be booted without warning. Traci Kuchta, one of Hardin’s attorneys, said the racism charges were trumped up as “the quickest way to get Gary out. We think the new manager had a problem with Gary’s sexual orientation and disability.”

Karen Randall, Denny’s director of PR, said Hardin is out for personal and financial gain: “He served the lawsuit with a TV crew.” She added that the investigation that led to the dismissal was set off by a fellow employee, not the new manager.

After getting the pink slip, Hardin collected 13 letters of recommendation -- three from former Denny’s managers. “You would’ve found out well before seven years of work if a person was racist,” Kuchta said.

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