

Wife of AOL chairman gives \$5.8 million to Florida school connected with fundamentalist church

Gay activist group bars AOL users as members

by Clay Ollis
Q-Notes Staff

FT. LAUDERDALE, FL — Jean Case, wife of AOL founder and chief executive Steve Case, donated over \$8 million to Westminster Academy, the school where she graduated in 1978, according to an October 16 story in the Ft. Lauderdale *Sun-Sentinel*.

The school sits adjacent to the campus of the ultra-right-wing Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church and according to its web site, "It exists primarily to educate the children of Coral Ridge families." That news prompted the National Gay Lobby to urge all GLBT users of AOL to switch ISPs immediately, explaining that by paying for AOL service, subscribers are helping to subsidize the anti-gay programs AOL funds.

Coral Ridge Presbyterian is the church pastored by Rev. D. James Kennedy, who is well known for anti-gay positions on every issue. The church sponsors "Worthy Creations," an ex-gay ministry which claims to offer a way out of homosexuality for those desiring to change. Coral Ridge also runs the "Center for Reclaiming America," which in 1999 launched a national ad campaign thanking Sen. Trent Lott and pro football player Reggie White for publicly proclaiming their anti-gay views.

The Center for Reclaiming America joined eighteen other right-wing organizations, including the Family Research Council and the Christian Coalition, to fund the "Truth In Love" ex-gay ad campaign, featuring Anne and John Paulk. Most recently, Coral Ridge Presbyterian led the opposition to a decision by the Ft. Lauderdale city council to cut funding to the Boy Scouts because of their discrimination against gays.

Jean Case defended her gift, saying the money was not coming from the Case Foundation, but from the Case's personal money, and that it was for scholarships to benefit underprivileged youth attending Jean Case's alma mater — it was not to benefit the church at all. She also stated she was opposed to discrimination and intolerance.

AOL does indeed have a non-discrimination policy and offers gay employees domestic partner benefits. But so do almost all tech companies: it's a requirement to be competitive.

According to research conducted for the story by Gay.com, only \$500,000 will be earmarked for scholarships, while over \$7 million will go toward building a new school building. Furthermore, Jean Case is president of the Case Foundation, while Steve Case is a member of the Board. And in 1998, the foundation itself gave \$100,000 to the McLean Bible Church, a similar fundamentalist congregation near the Case's home, which also is involved with ex-gay groups affiliated with Exodus International. McLean Bible Church's web site also has links



to the Family Research Council and Focus on the Family.

On October 20, the National Gay Lobby (NGL, nationalgaylobby.org) board of directors responded to the news by adopting a resolution calling upon all GLBT and supportive America Online users to immediately switch service providers. The resolution also bars NGL from accepting new members who use AOL as their Internet Service Provider (ISP).

In presenting the resolution adopted yesterday to the NGL board, NGL Executive Director Michael Romanello explained why he believes the drastic action was called for.

"After a full year of this AOL nonsense, including what we all believe to be AOL's discriminatory enforcement of its Terms of Service policy and other actions which negatively impact that company's gay and lesbian users, I have come to the conclusion that anyone who financially supports AOL is an enemy of our community, be they straight individuals, businesses, or organizations, or gay versions of the aforementioned," wrote Romanello in a message to the NGL board. "You cannot walk with the devil and remain sin free. Gay Internet users have got to understand that they cannot support AOL financially and think of themselves as being supportive of the gay equality movement. They are not, and it's time they are made to understand that."

According to NGL President Jayce Fortwangler, existing NGL members who use AOL as their ISP will be able to retain their NGL memberships. "As memberships come up for renewal, NGL members now using AOL will receive a letter explaining why they must switch ISPs in order to renew their NGL membership," said Fortwangler.

NationalGayLobby.Org is working now to provide current AOL users who wish to switch ISP with an acceptable alternative. "I placed calls yesterday to AOL competitor Earthlink/Mindspring's Vice President of Marketing Brinton Young and to E/M's Vice President of Brand Marketing Claudia Caplan to notify them of our pending announcement," said Romanello. "We are going to do our best to provide NGL members, and gay and lesbian Internet users in general, with an economical and advantageous deal if they switch from AOL to Earthlink/Mindspring." ▼

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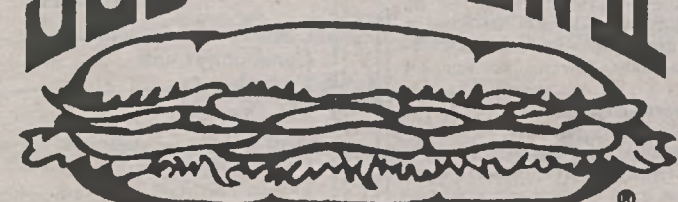
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