

In 1996, Red Lobster terminated the employment of Dale Hall at its restaurant in Lincolnwood, reports the Sept. 12 *Chicago Tribune*. Hall sued Red Lobster, and his case was initially heard by hearing officer David Lee. Lee's ruling that Red Lobster violated Cook County's civil rights laws was unanimously upheld by the six-member panel.

In addition to reinstating Hall, Red Lobster was ordered to pay Hall \$50,000 in damages for pain and suffering plus \$45,000 in back pay, interest and lost value of benefits. Red Lobster must also conduct diversity training at its six Cook County restaurants.

Red Lobster is a unit of Orlando-based Darden Restaurants Inc., which declined to comment on the ruling.

INDIANA

Republican state Reps. Woody Burton and Jack Lutz called a news conference to announce their plans to introduce legislation in the next session of the General Assembly that would ban gay men and lesbians from adopting children.



They arranged to hold the news conference in the office of Anderson Mayor Mark Lawler. What they didn't count on was Marla Stevens.

Stevens, who said she represented gay men and lesbians in Indiana, held the floor for 45 minutes speaking out against those she said "would steal our children," *The Indianapolis Star Tribune* reported Sept. 19.

Stevens' filibuster began when Bill Smith, executive director of the Indianapolis-based Indiana Family Institute, started to introduce the legislators.

"I don't intend to stand and sit still while you defame me and millions of gay Hoosiers in the process," said Stevens.

At one point, she climbed up on the mayor's conference table and sat down. She also slammed the rostrum with such force that the blow turned off a reporter's tape recorder.

Eventually, the mayor, the legislators and others went into the mayor's private office. Stevens followed, but left minutes later. She was promptly arrested and charged with disorderly conduct and resisting arrest.

Burton and Lutz plan to model their bill after similar laws in Florida and New Hampshire.

"It's nothing against lifestyles. It's protection of the family and the protection of the children involved," said Lutz.

MICHIGAN

The Triangle Foundation, a Detroit-based gay and lesbian rights group, is mad and isn't going to take it anymore.

Wayne County Circuit Court Judge Susan Borman ruled that state Rep. Deborah Whyman, a Republican, defamed the Triangle Foundation when she claimed in her 1996 campaign literature that the group endorses pedophilia, reports the Sept. 16 *Detroit Free Press*.



Unless an appeals court reverses Borman's decision, a jury will determine how much the Triangle Foundation should be awarded for damages. Whyman and her lawyer say they plan to appeal.

The whole thing started during Whyman's successful 1996 campaign for the Michigan House of Representatives. Her campaign published literature about her opponent, Deborah Nesbit, that read: "Leaders of the Triangle Foundation have made large contributions to Nesbit. The group has proclaimed its support for sex acts between grown men and boys."

The foundation demanded a retraction and an apology. When neither was forthcoming, it sued in March 1997. Whyman declined several opportunities to settle the case.

"Ms. Whyman believes that her statements are constitutionally protected and she did not want to settle the case just to avoid what she calls legal terrorism," said her attorney, Robert Huth Jr.

Whyman played a significant role in the passage of the state's 1996 Defense of Marriage Act, which prohibits same-gender marriages.

NEW JERSEY

A lesbian who argued she was practically a parent to her ex-partner's 4-year-old twins has been denied joint custody and visitation rights to the children, according to a Sept. 23 Associated Press report.

In the Sept. 21 ruling, Superior Court Judge Philip Cummis likened legal status of the woman to that of a stepparent. He said state law does not give third parties an automatic right to visitation or custody of a partner's biological children.

A ruling for the woman, identified in court papers only as V.C., would have been one of the first in the country to give custodial rights to the former partners of lesbian mothers.

"This is an enormous disappointment, to say the least," said Gina Reiss, executive director of the New Jersey Lesbian and Gay Coalition.



According to the AP, courts in Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and Utah have held that nonbiological partners have the right to sue for custody or visitation after a relationship ends.

Earlier this year, a trial judge in New Mexico awarded a nonbiological stepparent full custody of the children of her ex.

Robin Wernik, V.C.'s attorney, told *The Star-Ledger* of Newark on Sept. 22 that her client would appeal the decision. "She loves the children dearly and she will not give up on them," he said.

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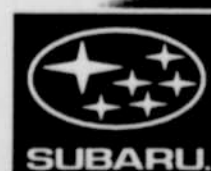


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