

**NORTHWEST news**

# MISAPPROPRIATED GROOMS

**Conservative group swipes wedding photo**

by Sarah Dougher

**L**ike many gay Portlanders, Steven Hansen and Rick Raymen were married last year in Multnomah County. Their image even graced the cover of *Just Out*—cover models for the gay marriage revolution.

A year later they woke to find their wedding picture being used in a homophobic advertisement condemning the American Association of Retired Persons. It seems that a conservative organization called USA Next, which presents itself as “an alternative to the liberal AARP,” used Hansen and Raymen’s wedding photo to link the AARP with same-sex marriage. Despite the fact that the AARP actually has no position on the issue, USA Next needed a wedge to portray the AARP as ridiculously liberal. By polarizing its intended audience, USA Next aims to gain support for President Bush’s Social Security plan.

AARP spokesman Steve Hahn says, “We’ve deliberately not responded to erroneous accusations of USA Next because USA Next does not propose legislation, vote on legislation, nor does it sign legislation into law.”

The rhetoric for the USA Next campaign was developed by the same people who creat-

After recovering from their initial shock at such egregious misrepresentation, Hansen and Raymen engaged lawyer Christopher Wolf, a partner in the New York-based law firm Proskauer Rose who lives in Washington, D.C.

He notes the couple “did not volunteer to be models for a 2005 right-wing hate campaign, and never would have consented to having their images plastered in an ad of any kind, much less the one USA Next chose to run. USA Next has violated the law and must take responsibility for the consequences. Tort law is quite clear that USA Next acted illegally.”

Wolf has sent USA Next a letter demanding that it immediately stop using photos of the couple and that it publicly apologize for the ongoing harm it is causing. “As our clients contemplate their full legal remedies, we are writing to demand that you immediately cease and desist using any photograph of our clients and that you publicly apologize to them for the use you already have made, and the harm you have already caused,” he wrote.

Hansen and Raymen are contemplating further legal action.

“The USA Next ad communicates the false message that gay marriages generally, and our

clients specifically, are the antithesis of supporting American troops during wartime,” Wolf says. “Gay marriage, and our clients’ ceremony, have nothing to do with support of the troops. Our clients are patriotic Americans who strongly support our service members.”

“We never signed up to be Harry and Louise for a hate-mongering group,” Raymen says, referring to the fictional couple used in television commercials to scuttle then-first lady Hillary Clinton’s health care proposal. “USA Next is illegally using our photo to portray us as a threat to American values. How would any citizen like having

their image stolen and broadcast for the purpose of tarring our troops and suggesting that you’re un-American?”

The national attention on this story has ranged from coverage in *USA Today* and *The Los Angeles Times* to CNN’s Judy Woodruff and MSNBC’s Chris Matthews. In addition, the ad has appeared on blog sites all over the Internet. This coverage allows the ad to creep, like a virus, into other media and into environments (such as the op-ed page of *The New York Times*) where it would not normally appear. In some significant media outlets such as *USA Today*, no mention was made of the illegal use of the Hansen-Raymen wedding photo.

As same-sex couples in Multnomah County celebrate their anniversaries this month, their legal status is still in limbo. This uncertainty does not, however, diminish the symbolic power that their unions have in the demand for civil rights. This power is nowhere clearer in the misappropriation of the Hansen-Raymen wedding photo by USA Next; it is just that in this case, its power was used to spread fear, lies and homophobia. **J**



## The REAL AARP Agenda

This ad, which appeared briefly on the *American Spectator* Web site and was designed to draw the ire of “liberal bloggers,” has since been pulled.

ed the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth campaign that sullied the reputation of then-presidential candidate John Kerry.

Ex-Marine Chris LaCivita, who wrote the Swift Boat commercials, is coordinating the anti-AARP media campaign. Rick Reed, whose Virginia-based ad agency Stevens Reed Curcio & Potholm handled production on those ads, will be again collaborating with LaCivita and Swift Boat PR agency Creative Response Concepts of Arlington, Va.

“We are going to be revealing areas where the AARP is out of touch with a large number of their members, including the issue of marriage,” Charlie Jarvis, USA Next’s chief executive, said in a statement. “We will engage AARP with an aggressive campaign to educate the people about where they really stand on the issues and how out of touch they are with the large majority of their own members.”

Jarvis took the helm at USA Next after working as the executive vice president of Focus on the Family, a conservative Christian group headed by James Dobson.

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