

Local nightclub found guilty of discrimination

Bar owner calls claim 'ridiculous'

Sean Myers

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A Calgary bar discriminated against a Vancouver man when a doorman barred him from entering the premises based on his ethnic background nearly four years ago, an Alberta human rights panel has ruled.

Tequila Bar and Grill has been ordered to pay Jaspal Randhawa \$5,000 in damages and officially apologize to him for the incident that took place July 9, 2004.

But one of the bar's owners called the accusation "ridiculous" and is considering an appeal of the decision.

While waiting in line to get into the 17th Avenue S.W. bar, Randhawa said, a doorman approached him and told him the owners were monitoring the line and were going to ask him to produce as many as 10 pieces of government-issued ID.

Randhawa protested and the bouncer said, "I feel bad, but I could lose my job if I let you in -- it's Cowtown and Stampede weekend. The owners want to maintain a certain image and don't want clients to say there are a lot of 'brown' people inside."

Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart, the chairwoman and sole member of the panel, found the testimony of Randhawa and his friend Arvinder Ghag to be credible. She ruled that the incident constituted discrimination based on ancestry or place of origin, race or colour, and religious beliefs.

"I'm very happy, this is a really favourable result," said Randhawa, 34, a certified general accountant. "Hopefully this will be a wake-up call to the industry that they can't do this anymore."

Tequila management insists it has never had a policy to restrict certain groups of people from entering the bar.

"Come down here any Friday or Saturday night and you'll see a wide variety of people -- staff and patrons," said co-owner P.J. L'heureux.

"This would never happen at our bar."

Tequila co-owner Harry Dimitriadis was listed as the respondent in the decision although he was not at the club at the time of the incident.

The owners say they were never able to find the doorman in question, who was described by Ghag as six-foot-two, 200 pounds, caucasian and wearing a cowboy hat.



CREDIT: Dean Bicknell, Calgary Herald

One of the owners of the Tequila Bar and Grill on 17th Avenue S.W. says it may appeal a human rights discrimination ruling.

Colley-Urquhart wrote that she could "find no evidence to indicate that the respondent took the complaint seriously and fully investigated the complaint."

Colley-Urquhart said she was particularly disturbed that the club seemed to be using its camera surveillance to select who would get in the door.

"This is an era of surveillance and surveillance was used by this bar," she said. "This young man was picked out of the lineup because of the colour of his skin and he was wearing a turban and then he was asked to leave the line. That's not acceptable."

Randhawa had originally filed complaints against three Calgary nightclubs, claiming he was denied entry due to racial profiling.

Tantra and Mynt subsequently settled with Randhawa, the details of which have not been disclosed.

In the summer of 2004, Global Calgary conducted an investigation into claims of discriminatory practices at local clubs. A news crew followed Randhawa and an Indo-Canadian friend with a hidden camera as the pair attempted to enter five Calgary nightclubs. Four of the five allowed them in.

"It's an important decision. All Calgarians should be able to go to any public place and not worry they won't get in because of the colour of their skin," said David Este, a University of Calgary professor currently working on the Racism, Violence and Health Project, a five-year, \$1.25-million study looking at the health effects of discrimination in Calgary, Toronto and Halifax.

"I wouldn't say this is a widespread phenomenon, but even if it happens to one or two people, it perpetuates the perception of Calgary and Alberta as being redneck.

"When it happens, it needs to be challenged. If we want to think of ourselves as a progressive city, we can't accept this type of behaviour."

The decision also requires Tequila to pay interest on the \$5,000 dating back to July 9, 2004, and to cover \$350 in travel expenses for Randhawa. The bar is ordered to implement a policy on racial discrimination in the workplace within two months, and staff and management are required to take part in an educational seminar conducted by the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission.

Tequila has 30 days to appeal the decision.

smyers@theherald.canwest.com

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