



Scripture returns to A&W in Frisco

Christine McManus

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FRISCO - Jesus has returned to the A&W Restaurant outdoor sign.

The owners are no longer obeying A&W corporate attorneys' orders not to post New Testament Bible scripture on the sign facing traffic on Summit Boulevard.

After several weeks of refraining from posting scripture on the sign outside, restaurant employees posted verse again.

The past few weeks were just a cooling-off period, said owners Reuben and Donna Drebenstedt, and now they are in the freedom-of-speech fight for the long haul.

"It wasn't very encouraging when the sign just said, 'Open.' We've been posting scripture for the past four years," said Reuben Drebenstedt, who is a Jewish Messianic Christian pastor.

"We're not doing it to be obnoxious. Anyone who knows me understands I'm not out to hurt anyone. It's my First Amendment right to post scripture on our sign."

Early this year, some people complained to A&W headquarters that they were offended by the franchise outlet. The Drebenstedts said the complainers were from Jewish people.

Inside the restaurant, leaflets are available that advertise the Messianic Jewish Christian religion, more commonly known as "Jews for Jesus."

Restaurant patrons who want a hamburger or root beer enter and exit beneath a plaque with Hebrew characters for the word "HaShem" or God, and the phrases "Psalm 1" and "Thank You."

The Anti-Defamation League stepped in on behalf of complainers.

The ADL said Messianic Jewish Christians "falsely claim that they are interested in Jewish practices when the real goal is to convert Jews to Christianity."

ADL asked A&W corporate officers to make sure the scripture is no longer posted.

The Drebenstedts said God began telling them four years ago to run the restaurant. They often close the restaurant to host religious gatherings among the fast-food booths.

Since the scripture disappeared in October from the 30-foot tall sign, people have been contacting the restaurant, the A&W corporate headquarters in Kentucky and the Summit Daily News.

Public reaction to the franchise flap ranges from disappointment to threats of boycott.

Jewish leaders in Summit County have said they do not know who complained. They said they support the Drebenstedt's freedom of speech.



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Inspirational verses are back on the A&W marquee along Summit Boulevard in Frisco after the chain's corporate headquarters asked local franchise owners to remove the scriptural references.

Summit Daily/Reid Williams



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But it might not be that simple. As a business, A&W possesses some legal control over its franchisee in Frisco.

"We originally received complaints about the religious messages," said A&W spokeswoman Virginia Ferguson. "We listen to these complaints because we do not want to offend any of our customers. We are hopeful this will be resolved amicably."

Reuben Drebenstedt said A&W has not been cooperating, as the corporate officials have said. Any discussions are between attorneys.

"They've offended thousands on our side. They call themselves the American food place, then they say we can't advertise to Christians," said Reuben Drebenstedt. "We'll continue (posting scripture) and we'll continue to pay them royalties. We are a high-producing store for them."

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