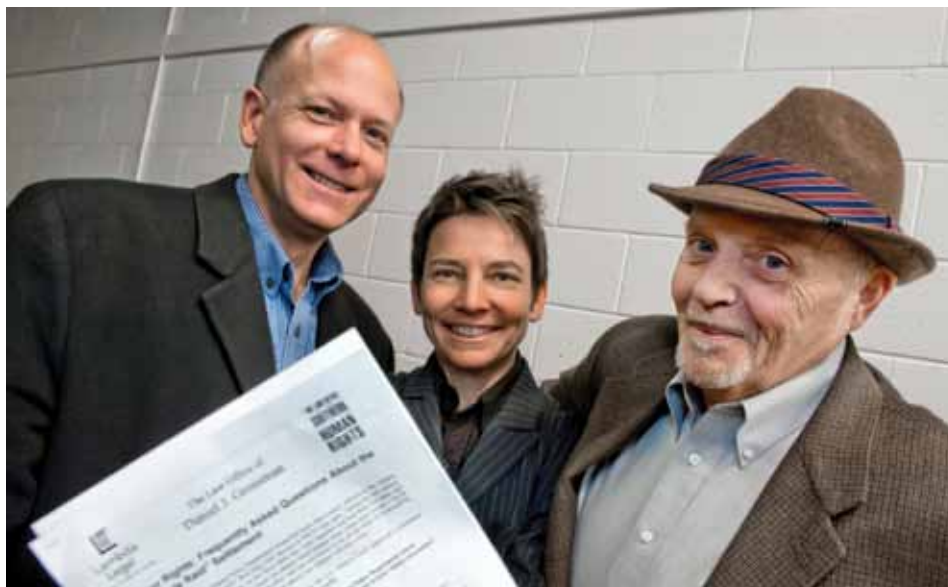


# A Southern Comfort

Atlanta Eagle patrons mistreated by police finally get justice.

By Jorge Morales, Content Editor/Producer



Lambda Legal Staff Attorney Beth Littrell (center) flanked by plaintiffs David Thomas (left) and Thom Hayes.

**IN DECEMBER, ATLANTA GAY BAR** customers subjected to unlawful police treatment were vindicated when the Atlanta Police Department announced it would overhaul search and seizure and arrest policies, and the city of Atlanta would pay \$1,025,000 in damages.

The settlement was the result of *Calhoun v. Pennington*, a suit which Lambda Legal launched with co-counsel Dan Grossman and the Southern Center for Human Rights in November 2009 against the city of Atlanta and 35 police personnel. Officers had forced customers to lie on the floor, some in spilled beer and broken glass, while they searched them, conducted background checks and hurled antigay slurs during an unwarranted raid in which no one was arrested or charged.

"It made me feel dehumanized," said plaintiff Mark Danak, an IT specialist who attended the Eagle after weekly rehearsals with the Atlanta Gay Men's Chorus. "To have them come in and humiliate us like that for no reason was just wrong. It made us feel like second-class citizens."

A federal judge found that the plaintiffs were unlawfully searched, detained and arrested during the raid and that none was personally

suspected of any criminal activity. Danak hopes the victory sends a message to law enforcement throughout the country: "Don't target any group just because they're different. And treat people with respect."

"Memo to government: Cut it out," wrote Education and Public Affairs Director Leslie Gabel-Brett in a *Huffington Post* column about the significance of this case. "When ordinary folks, whether LGBT or not, stop by a bar to meet people and have a drink, they should not be afraid that their town or city police force will send officers to burst in on them, terrorize and insult them, and force them to lie on the floor without a valid reason. That's unfair and unconstitutional."

Another plaintiff, Iraq war veteran Chris Daniels, said following the settlement, "I hope this never happens again to anyone."

"Because our clients stood up against the injustice done to them, the Atlanta Police Department will be a better force for good in the community," said Supervising Senior Staff Attorney Greg Nevins. "Nobody should have to endure the inexcusable law enforcement conduct that occurred at the Atlanta Eagle." **L**



**"I HOPE THIS NEVER HAPPENS AGAIN TO ANYONE."**

—Chris Daniels, plaintiff



FOR MORE ON THE CALHOUN V PENNINGTON CASE, PLEASE VISIT:  
[www.lambdalegal.org/calhoun-v-pennington](http://www.lambdalegal.org/calhoun-v-pennington)