

City Utility Drops 'Duck Dynasty' Contest Over LGBT Fears

Tolerance and diversity do not include men who wear camouflage or beards, according to Michigan's largest municipally owned utility.

The Lansing Board of Water and Light (BWL) has decided to cancel an upcoming *Duck Dynasty* look-alike contest because the contest might offend people, a spokesman for the utility told me.

"The decision was made in light of controversial remarks by a *Duck Dynasty* cast member against the LGBT community," the public utility said in a statement. "The BWL is committed to diversity and respect community differences, and we regret if the contest offended anyone."

I figured there had to be more to the story so I called Steve Serkaian. He earns his paycheck as the official spokesman of the BWL—and was kind enough to give me the backstory.

For nearly 20 years, the public utility has been hosting a chili cook-off. The proceeds are donated to charity.

One of the most popular events is the rubber duck race. For all you folks living in New York City's Upper East Side, here's how it works: You buy a duck and then dump it into the Grand River. They typically have about 500 ducks—and the first one to float across the finish line wins a big prize.

There's just one tiny problem: It normally takes about a half-hour for the rubber ducks to float down the river. That's a lot of time to twiddle your thumbs. But this year, the folks at the BWL decided to fill the void with a *Duck Dynasty* look-

alike contest.

On Monday, the BWL announced the competition. Later that afternoon, they received an email from a local citizen complaining about it.

The *Lansing State Journal* identified the aggrieved citizen as Danielle Casavant. She told the newspaper that the contest “showed poor judgment on their part.”

“The City of Lansing has come out very publicly promoting equality,” she told the newspaper. “It seemed hypocritical to do something that glamorizes and promotes the show in any way.”

Serkaian told me there were concerns about *Duck Dynasty* patriarch Phil Robertson’s comments about homosexuality.

Last December, Robertson created a stir when he told *GQ* magazine that he believed homosexuality is a sin. He also quoted a Bible verse to defend his personally held opinion. (God forbid anybody have one of those in this post-tolerant world.)

I wrote about the intolerance of Robertson’s critics in my upcoming book, *God Less America: Real Stories From the Front Lines of the Attack on Traditional Values*.

“It took about a minute to make the decision to drop the contest,” Serkaian told me. “We did not want anything to detract from this long-standing family-friendly festival.”

He said the look-alike contest had been in the planning stages before the December controversy and they were not aware of what Robertson had said until Monday.

“This company has a commitment to inclusiveness and diversity,” Serkaian said. “We have our own diversity department. We take quite seriously our commitment to that.”

Something tells me they probably sell kale chips and wheatgrass in the office vending machines.

You would think that BWL had been overwhelmed with a deluge of customers furious about the *Duck Dynasty* contest, but that's not the case at all. In fact, only one complaint was lodged. A little overreaction perhaps?

"No," Serkaian told me. "She was not wrong. Her comment was right. We have a very active and strong LGBT community in Lansing."

I'm sure they do. And I'm also sure they have a very active and strong *Duck Dynasty* community in Lansing. Why can't the public utility tolerate and respect them?

Serkaian made sure that he hammered home the idea that the chili cook-off is a "family-friendly" event. I wasn't quite sure how to take that comment. Was he suggesting that *Duck Dynasty* is not family-friendly because of their religious beliefs?

At the end of the day, it was all about the public utility's public image.

"We did not want to take the risk of this blowing up into a controversy that would detract from this long-standing family-friendly festival," he said. (See my point about "family-friendly"?)

It's really unfortunate that the folks in Lansing are served by a public utility company that believes the only way to achieve tolerance is through intolerance. In my book, that duck just won't float.

To quote the great Louisiana philosopher Uncle Si, "That's a fact, Jack."

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newsletter, be sure to join his Facebook page, and follow him on Twitter. His latest book is God Less America.