

TWU grad proceeds with complaint

Amaruk co-CEO says company legitimate, media out to discredit him

HUMAN RIGHTS
NATHANIEL CHRISTOPHER

The co-CEO of a company at the centre of a BC human rights complaint insists that Amaruk Wilderness Corp is a legitimate business and that he is the victim of an unfair media campaign.

Trinity Western University (TWU) graduate Bethany Paquette filed a human rights complaint Sept 30 alleging that Amaruk rejected her for a job, following a heated email exchange, because she's Christian and attended a Christian university.

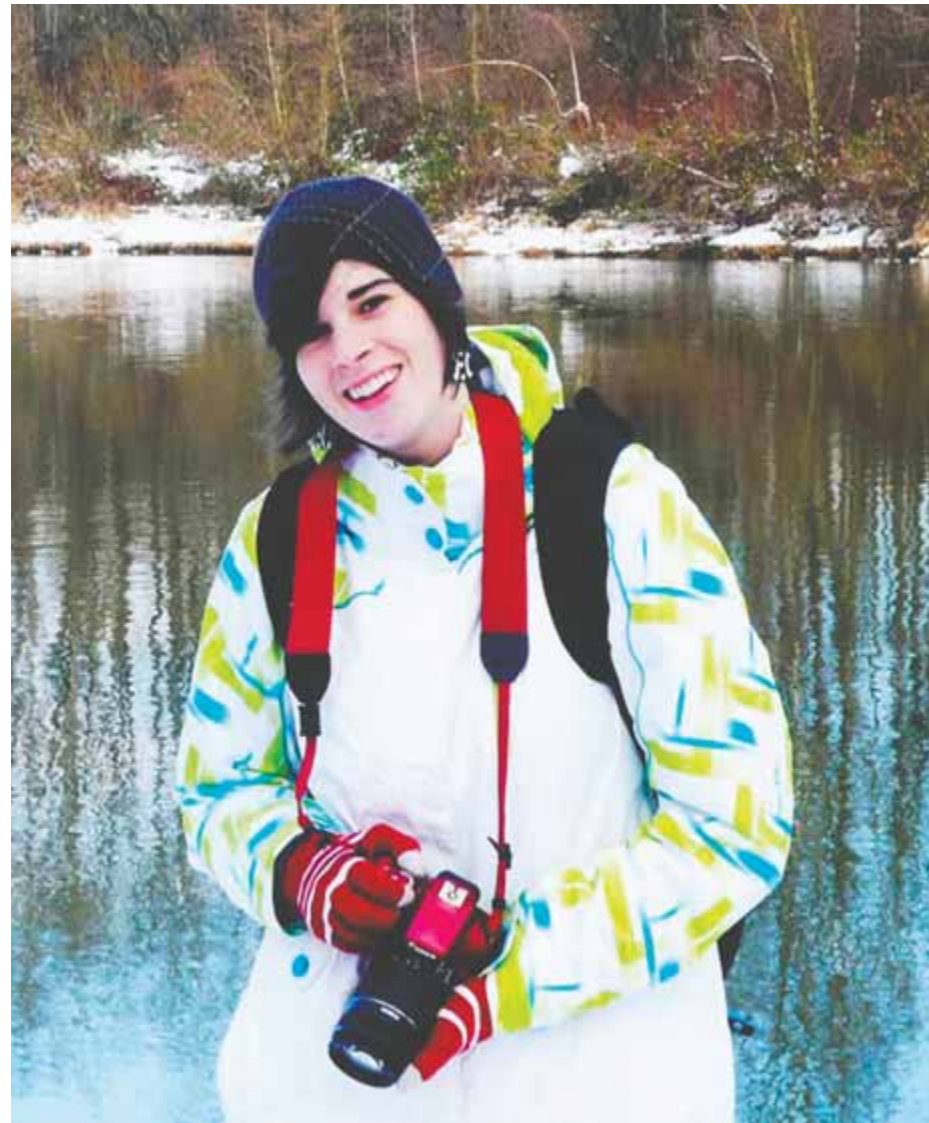
Christopher Fragassi-Bjørnsen says the emails were an exchange of opinion, not discrimination. He says media are now trying to discredit him and Amaruk.

Paquette applied by email Sept 10 to work as an assistant guide intern for Amaruk. The next day she received a reply signed by Olaf Amundsen, the company's hiring manager. “I do not understand the purpose of your application considering you do not meet the minimum requirements that are clearly outlined on our web site,” Amundsen allegedly wrote.

“Additionally, considering you were involved with Trinity Western University, I should mention that, unlike Trinity Western University, we embrace diversity, and the right of people to sleep with or marry whoever they want, and this is reflected within some of our staff and management,” the email continued. “In addition, the Norse background of most of the guys at the management level means that we are not a Christian organization, and most of us actually see Christianity as having destroyed our culture, tradition, and way of life.”

“I would say that in my experience at Trinity Western, I never heard of or saw any discrimination. And for me to simply apply for a job and to be attacked because of the university I went to is pretty hurtful, and I felt wronged,” Paquette tells *Xtra*. “It's a very accepting campus, and all people are treated with respect. I also want to say minorities should be protected and shouldn't be discriminated against by belief or stance in life. The value of people is important and shouldn't ever be belittled.”

TWU's proposal to open a law school has met with mixed responses across the country, as law



Bethany Paquette, a self-described “proud Christian” and graduate of Trinity Western University, has filed a human rights complaint against Amaruk Wilderness Corp. FACEBOOK.COM

societies grapple with the Christian university's student covenant, which prohibits homosexuality and premarital sex and threatens to expel students for non-compliance.

Fragassi-Bjørnsen tells *Xtra* that his colleagues' comments about TWU and Christianity had nothing to do with their decision not to hire Paquette. “If a person applies for a job at an airline and they don't have the proper qualifications, namely the pilot's licence, any conversation that ensues afterwards is irrelevant to the hiring process. In order to be an assistant guide intern, you need a certified assistant guide certificate. When some-

one doesn't meet requirements, we don't look at their application anymore.”

Paquette's lawyer, Geoffrey Trotter, disputes this. “The grounds for discrimination don't need to be the main factor — they can just be part of the decision-making process,” he tells *Xtra*. “It's not going to fly for them to say, ‘We didn't hire for this reason,’ when most of the email filled up with things about her religion.”

CBC News reported Oct 10 that more job applicants came forward after hearing Paquette's story, claiming they, too, had received rejection emails from Amaruk Wilderness. Futile efforts to

“Bethany's experience reminds us that all minorities are in need of protection, and for that reason, I would hope the LGBT community would feel empathy for Bethany and her complaint.”

— LAWYER GEOFFREY TROTTER


reach the company's co-CEO left them questioning whether the business or jobs actually exist.

In a phone interview Oct 14, Fragassi-Bjørnsen tells *Xtra* that all employees listed on the company website are real but have signed a nondisclosure agreement. He also says the challenges to Amaruk's legitimacy are baseless. “All the licences and registration and all the documents point to the fact that the company is real, yet everyone has ignored that,” he says.

Fragassi-Bjørnsen refers to a page on Amaruk's website that includes links to the company's various licences and registrations, including a licence to operate guided backpacking tours in Pacific Rim National Park, an outfitter licence for Klusane National Park and Reserve, and certificates of incorporation for Canada, British Columbia, Yukon and Ontario.

Trotter says his client's complaint will proceed regardless, since Amaruk is legally registered in BC and Christopher Fragassi is listed on the corporate registration.

“Neither he nor the company have denied sending the emails to Bethany,” reads an Oct 10 press release from Trotter. “Whether or not some of the emails were sent under pseudonyms, or whether or not Mr Fragassi has exaggerated the size or capabilities of his company, both the company and Mr Fragassi himself will need to answer to the Human Rights Tribunal for their discriminatory decision. The true author of the ‘Olaf Amundsen’ emails will also need to answer for their harassing language. The fact that Mr Fragassi appears to be a BC resident will simply make it easier to enforce an anti-discrimination order from the Human Rights Tribunal.”

 [Read the full story on dailyxtra.com.](#)