

## **Dinner's on Us: We're serving up reconciliation**

12:05 AM CST on Friday, March 12, 2004

State Sen. Royce West, D-Dallas

Colleen Barrett, president of Southwest Airlines

Jeff Bogg, recently fired Southwest employee

Kevin West, Southwest employee

Dear folks,

We have followed Steve Blow's columns about Southwest Airlines' firing of maintenance supervisor Jeff Bogg with more a sense of sorrow than anger.

Oh, there's plenty for folks to be angry over. The facts, as we understand them, are these: Mr. Bogg was having an especially good time at the company Christmas party and made a remark involving the word "monkey" to a black fellow employee and his family. The employee, Kevin West, took it as racist and objected. Mr. Bogg denied that he had meant anything racial and apologized on the spot.

Still, Mr. West filed a formal complaint with the airline, which terminated Mr. Bogg \* this despite a spotless 16-year record and several co-workers (including an African-American) saying Mr. Bogg never had shown bigotry. It later emerged that before Mr. Bogg's firing, state Sen. Royce West, a brother of the offended employee, telephoned the airline to protest the remark.

Mr. Blow has been hearing from outraged whites who believe Mr. Bogg was canned unjustly because of political correctness and a politician's pull. He also has heard from furious blacks convinced that whites don't understand the pain African-Americans have borne from racism.

We think both sides have a point. Yet Mr. Blow recognized the deeper point when he wrote, "This is now much bigger than one man's job or one family's pride. It's really about our progress toward racial unity and equity."

That's where the sorrow comes in. It's time to lance this ugly boil.

We're big believers in the Dallas Dinner Table project, in which diverse groups of Dallas residents break bread together and practice racial understanding and reconciliation. Inspired by a letter to the editor from Ralph Goin of Frisco on Wednesday, we'd like to invite all four of you to dinner. We'll host and pick up the check. With good will and good cooking, the West family will get its dignity back; Mr. Bogg, the father of a disabled child, will recover his job; and Southwest will avoid an ongoing public-relations debacle.

Best of all, the city stands to learn a powerful lesson in the healing power of grace and mercy.

So, how about it? R.S.V.P.

Sincerely,

The Dallas Morning News Editorial Board