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Couple: Maine lawsuit vindicates our claims

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Judy Garvey and Jim Bergin of Blue Hill, Maine, have been fighting legal battles against the Kittery, Maine-based Gentle Wind Project for years.

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Maine has filed a 33-page lawsuit against Gentle Wind alleging a multitude of violations, including misleading the public about the benefits of healing instruments they make and improperly spending donations.

Bergin and Garvey, through their website, called Wind of Changes, have been making similar claims — as well as more scandalous accusations — against the group since 2004. The site is located at www.windofchanges.org.

Gentle Wind has sued Garvey and Bergin over their statements.

Mary Miller, president of Gentle Wind, has said the couple's website destroyed the nonprofit business and ruined the lives of those who work there.

"We plan to pursue this for as long as it takes," she said in an interview in January.

She would not comment when contacted recently, citing legal advice. A judge late last year dismissed the first lawsuit Gentle Wind filed against Garvey and Bergin in federal court. The suit alleged the pair were part of a coordinated campaign to damage the group's reputation.

Gentle Wind's federal suit also had targeted several other people who re-posted Wind of Changes material or added links to it on their websites.

Gentle Wind since has filed a new suit against Bergin and Garvey in York County Superior Court alleging defamation. A trial should occur by November, Garvey said.

Bergen and Garvey, who are married, have filed counterclaims alleging Gentle Wind organizers wrote negatively about their mental health and moral character on the project's website — gentlewindproject.org.

Garvey, who calls herself a former member of Gentle Wind, describes it as high-control group.

"There were deep secrets that nobody shared until we told our story," Garvey said.

She and her husband both have written about their experiences. She said, "We don't want people to go through what we went through."

Garvey said Maine's Attorney General has made many of the same allegations in its lawsuit as she has on her website about the healing instruments.

"It shows that we were telling the truth," she said. "It vindicates our stories."

Maine's lawsuit, however, does not refer to any cultlike activity.

Garvey has said the group cons people into ritualistic group sex as part of the process it uses to produce its healing instruments.

"Just as we supported them in our true belief that we were assisting people, there are still people in that same mindset," Garvey said.

Garvey said the practice was called "energy work" and involved group sexual activity between the leaders and followers in which all the participants were women except for John Miller, the founder, who is named as one of the defendants in Maine's lawsuit.

She said the process of learning about what goes on inside the group is slow, so she did not know what she was getting into. But she eventually participated in the rituals.

"It sounds crazy, I know," she said. "But that's what we believed."

Gentle Wind has written on its website that the concepts for the instruments are relayed to them through the spirit world.

Garvey says Gentle Wind's leaders use that terminology to reel people in. "It's a hook to hook people on," she said. "It's a trick."

She claims Miller designs "trauma cards" on a computer, prints them out and laminates them.

She said any claims Gentle Wind makes about the effective results of its instruments could be from treatments a doctor is giving or a placebo effect.

"The healing, of course, was all in the eyes of the person administering this so-called research," she said.

Garvey said Gentle Wind leaders frivolously spend donations to the group on homes, personal property and their lawsuit against her and her husband.

Maine's lawsuit also accuses Gentle Wind of improperly spending charitable donations.

Mary Miller has said Garvey began making accusations about the organization after she was asked to leave a research position there.

She has denied the accusations of cultlike activity. Garvey should not even call herself a "former member," because there is no membership, Mary Miller has said.

Gentle Wind's attorney in the lawsuit against Garvey and Bergin could not be reached for comment. Phil Malone, director of the Clinical Program in Cyberlaw at the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard Law School, has been helping Bergin and Garvey's primary lawyer, Jerrol Crouter of Portland's Drummond Woodsum & MacMahon.

Many charges in Maine's suit "dramatically confirm" many of Bergin and Garvey's statements about Gentle Wind, Malone wrote in an e-mail to Foster's. "One of our priorities is to work to protect free speech on the Internet, particularly speech that discusses matters of important public interest or seeks to expose questionable or fraudulent activities," he said. "Gentle Wind's lawsuit was particularly troubling to us because it tried to use the legal system to stifle such speech."