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25 March 2003

Lowe's Customer Support Center
Attn: Public Relations
1605 Curtis Bridge Rd.
Wilkesboro, NC 28697

Sir or Madam:

I am writing to bring to your attention an incident involving the community relations of your Lowe's store in Champaign, Illinois. In the community of Champaign-Urbana, there have been, for the past few months, peaceful and lawful demonstrations against our impending, and now ongoing, war with Iraq. These demonstrations consist of citizens lining the sidewalks in the busy shopping area (with a severe shortage of public parking) on the corner of North Prospect Avenue and Marketview Drive, holding signs and conversing with motorists as they pass by. For several weeks, until recently, both demonstrators and counter-demonstrators (in favor of the invasion of Iraq) have counted on the use of the back otherwise unused portion of the Lowe's parking lot to park their cars while demonstrating. (To date, I can say with fair certainty that this use of the parking lot did not deprive customers of parking or directly disrupt their shopping.) I can say personally that this generosity was greatly appreciated by myself and fellow demonstrators, and I encouraged my friends and colleagues to patronize the local Lowe's to show their support.

However, word from the local manager has reached the demonstrators that they will be towed in the future. **I am not disputing this decision or its enforcement. Rather, I wish to bring to your attention one incident I believe to be inappropriate:**

On Saturday, March 22 at around 11:45 am, I called the Champaign Lowe's to discuss this matter. I reproduce here, to the best of my memory, what happened:

FEMALE ASSOCIATE: Thank you for calling Lowe's. How can I help you?

MYSELF: Is there a manager I can speak with?

ASSOCIATE: He's with a customer. Can I help you?

MYSELF: Yes. Is it true that your store will be towing cars of peace demonstrators?

ASSOCIATE: Yes.

MYSELF: Whose decision was this?

ASSOCIATE: The manager's.

MYSELF: Well, could you please pass a message onto the manager for me; that as long as this policy continues, I, a regular customer, and my friends and colleagues will no longer be shopping at your store.

ASSOCIATE: Yes, and thank you for supporting our troops who are dying for your rights! (Quickly hung up.)

Naturally, you can understand my doubt that my message was ever relayed to a manager who possibly condones this sort of customer treatment. More than this, I was surprised to

hear that a Lowe's employee was using her status as a representative of Lowe's to voice, rudely and sarcastically, her own political agenda. **My purpose in calling was not to argue the decision or contest its legitimacy, but to simply and politely let the management know a consequence of this decision.** Furthermore, I'm sure you can also understand my reluctance to resume shopping in a store with such a hostile, politicized atmosphere.

In these times, I understand your reluctance to appear to be "taking sides" in current political conflicts. However, I have to wonder if the decision to enforce towing would have been made had the citizens in question been counter-demonstrators in favor of our current invasion of Iraq. More than this, though, I feel that Lowe's, as an important member of the Champaign-Urbana community, has a unique opportunity to do what it can, without sacrificing the primary goal of customer service, to, in a neutral manner, support the American ideals of free speech and political dialogue. If doing this should compromise customer service, I hope that it will be made clear that the decision to tow demonstrators is an apolitical one, and that Lowe's employees will relay feedback from the community to management without grinding their own political axes while on duty.

I will be forwarding a copy of this letter to the management of the local Lowe's in Champaign, as well as to various community organizations that were also effected by this decision. I look forward to hearing from you and resolving the questions of what the motivation for these actions was and hearing how Lowe's will help repair the alienation and confusion that has occurred.

Cordially,

Robert D. Day