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East Coast Friars

Win Legal Battle

A long-running East Coast-West Coast Friars Club war has been won by the East Coast. Judge Otis D. Wright of the Federal District Court in Los Angeles ordered the Friars of Beverly Hills on Sept. 14 to stop using the Friars name by Oct. 15. The decision was a victory for the original Friars Club, a fraternal organization of entertainers founded in 1904 and situated in a six-story town house on East 55th Street in Manhattan. The New York Friars, a nonprofit organization, spent \$300,000 in legal fees arguing that in 2004 after the pharmaceutical heir Darren Schaeffer bought the financially strapped West Coast outpost of the Friars Club, he transformed it from a nonprofit to a commercial operation and sought to exploit the Friars name. The Beverly Hills club, in a largely windowless building on Santa Monica Boulevard, was founded in 1947 by entertainers who had moved from New York. Its heyday was in the 1960s and '70s when hosts like Dean Martin and Milton Berle presided over roasts attended by Frank Sinatra, Don Rickles, Fred Astaire, Bob Newhart and others. Membership dwindled through the 1980s and '90s as the club fell into disrepair before Mr. Schaeffer's efforts to rejuvenate its restaurant and attract private events. Contacted by phone yesterday, Mr. Schaeffer said he "wasn't aware" that the club, where he invested around \$10 million and was listed as chief executive, had permanently lost its right to the Friars name. Freddie Roman, dean of the Friars Club in New York, said the victory allowed the club to protect its name. "I feel very vindicated," he said, adding that he was now focused on endeavors like the Oct. 19 roast of the comedian Pat Cooper at the New York Hilton, with Lisa Lampanelli as toastmistress. ALLEN SALKIN