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ACORN exposé duo rooted in conservative ideology

Both involved with institutions pushing slanted journalism

By Justin Pritchard

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LOS ANGELES — Much of America discovered James O'Keefe III and Hannah Giles through their hidden-camera, make-believe-pimp-and-prostitute videos of ACORN employees giving advice about establishing a brothel with underage hookers.

But as far back as 2006 — well before the videos became a national sensation and conservative rallying cry — O'Keefe and Giles connected with a pair of Washington conservative institutions that boast programs training ideological journalists.

Giles, 20, a sophomore at Florida International University, spent the summer on a \$1,200-a-month internship with the National Journalism Center, a training organization whose alumni include conservative commentator Ann Coulter.

After graduating from Rutgers University in 2006, O'Keefe, 25, was paid to set up magazines and newspapers on university campuses for the Leadership Institute, which recruits potential conservative public-policy and media stars.

O'Keefe and Giles say no one helped them conceive, execute or finance their video project, which with remarkable speed has devastated the activist community service group Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, commonly known as ACORN.

They have said that a shoestring \$1,300 budget was all it took to shoot video in at least five ACORN offices, including one in National City.

In the footage, workers at various ACORN offices advise Giles to list her occupation on financial documents as “freelancer,” “performance artist” or “entertainer” instead of prostitute; offer tips on how to claim underage girls — who were to be trafficked in from Central America — as dependents on her

tax return; and discuss the best place to illegally cross the U.S.-Mexico border.

The mastermind behind the video-release strategy was Andrew Breitbart, a Web impresario, *Washington Times* columnist and critic of Hollywood liberalism who was readying the launch of a Web site, biggovernment.com.

O'Keefe approached Breitbart with his video; Breitbart said he shopped the material to a prominent network news personality at least a week before the eventual launch, but was told that the network would never air it because of the politics behind it.

He said he then gave Fox News the exclusive.

During an interview of Giles on Sept. 10, the day the first video was posted on biggovernment.com, Fox talk-show host Glenn Beck said he had seen footage Sept. 5.

Giles and O'Keefe first met in person the day before making their first ACORN video, said Richard Rahn, a free-market advocate at the libertarian Cato Institute and an economics columnist for the *Washington Times* who mentored Giles during her summer.

Rahn met Giles through a mutual friend of her father.

Giles was paid for her internship at the National Journalism Center.

Giles' father, Doug — a pastor at the Miami-area Clash Church and a conservative commentator — wrote in a townhall.com column that he gave no money to the project and that Fox paid only for hotels and airfare when his daughter and O'Keefe were interviewed.

“Having my kid dress like a hooker and infiltrate such a place is not in my repertoire,” Doug Giles wrote. “That was Hannah's baby from start to finish.”

O'Keefe, a self-described “skinny nerd,” delights in turning the tactics of liberal community organizers against them; the crowning touch on his pimp getup was his grandmother's chinchilla shoulder throw.

He is now a student at Fordham University's graduate business program in Manhattan, though not taking classes this semester, the school said.

Though he has said he has no formal training as a journalist, O'Keefe helped found a conservative monthly journal called *The Centurion* as an undergraduate at Rutgers, an hour's drive south from his family's home in the comfortable suburb of Westwood, N.J.

Breitbart said he learned of O'Keefe's work from Maura Flynn, the wife of biggovernment.com Editor in Chief Mike Flynn and an assistant producer of the 2004 film “Michael Moore Hates America.”

Breitbart said that on Aug. 7, he greeted O'Keefe at his Los Angeles home, went into his basement office and watched the Baltimore ACORN footage on O'Keefe's laptop. He wanted to see more.

After O'Keefe sent the Washington and San Bernardino ACORN videos, Breitbart concluded that it was a natural fit to launch his Web site.

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