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They didn't get their money's worth

By ERIC DENHOFF

The former head of a Calgary franchise of the Church of Scientology who collected more than \$300,000 in fees since 1968 says local people "didn't get their money's worth."

Lorna Levitt, who resigned from the church April 19, said Wednesday Calgarians paid up to \$5,000 a piece for spiritual counselling "seeking absolute and total freedom" at her urging, but said "it didn't do for everyone what it was supposed to."

The local mission — a franchise — was incorporated in January 1970 as a non-profit organization.

Levitt said Wednesday she sent a number of people to advanced Scientology courses in Los Angeles and England and that 32 people had reached a "clear" status within the local group, "at a cost of at least \$5,000 a piece."

"They were promised total freedom. I saw that it didn't work for everyone and after a while started to question it," she said.

"They didn't get their money's worth."

She said she paid herself \$50 a week until 1971, when, for a one-year period, she made \$10,000 in wages.

Levitt said more than \$100,000 of the money collected in Calgary was sent to Scientology's Los Angeles office.

In advertisements placed in Calgary newspapers, Levitt and another dissident, John Hooker, say they left the organization because of "harassment of people who seek to leave Scientology or criticize it publicly or internally; contracts within the organization that penalize a staff member with financial burdening if he seeks to leave or objection (and) organized methods of bringing public scandal, degradation or disgrace to dissidents."

An official release from Scientology's Toronto office, under the signature of Rev. Harvey Schmiecke, says Levitt was "expelled months ago in an attempt to inhibit her unorthodox religious practices. Several attempts at rehabilitation have failed and Mrs. Levitt has been expelled."

He said Levitt and her followers no longer have the right to use the word Scientology in their counselling.

He said "it is our view that Mrs. Levitt is sympathetic to institutional psychiatry and practices currently employed there."

The official church organization is against institutional psychiatry.