

Years with sect span tax battles, infiltrations and acquisitions

CLEARWATER SUN SUNDAY NOV. 4, 1979

The following is a chronology of local events from the Scientologists' 1975 purchase of the former Fort Harrison hotel to last week's release of church documents by a federal judge in Washington, D.C.

1975

Oct. 27—Fort Harrison officials acknowledge sale of the hotel, saying the Jack Tar chain will cease operations on Nov. 30. The buyer is Southern Land Development and Leasing Corp.

Nov. 5—Citizens learn Southern Land has agreed to buy another downtown landmark, the old Bank of Clearwater building for \$550,000 in cash.

Nov. 12—United Churches of Florida is the Fort Harrison's new tenant, according to Sorrel Allen, membership director for the group and its first official to arrive in Clearwater. Allen pledges openness, saying he is eager to work with local groups that want to use the former hotel.

Dec. 2—The Fort Harrison sale is consummated and recorded at the county courthouse, showing that Southern Land paid Jack Tar \$2.3 million in cash.

1976

Jan. 23—Mayor Gabriel Cazares, voicing general suspicion, releases correspondence and a memorandum in which he questions United Churches for its tight security and unusual secrecy.

Jan. 25—In a review of the 3-month-old, Fort Harrison sale which traces money for the purchase to a bank in Luxembourg and confirms continuing investigations of the matter, the Clearwater Sun reports that suspicion about the hotel is at an all-time high.

Jan. 28—The Church of Scientology of California ends the suspense, sending its spokesman to explain that it formed United Churches in the hope of bringing religions together. Spokesman Arthur Maren acknowledges that at least half of the Fort Harrison residents are Scientologists but says the cult is not trying to use the United Churches as a base for proselytizing.

Jan. 29—Maren acknowledges that should United Churches fail to gain public support, the Fort Harrison will become a center for advanced Scientology study. The community reacts to its new neighbors with caution and skepticism.

Jan. 30—In a sweeping counter-attack, Maren releases a list of charges against Cazares, saying the mayor's criticism of the Scientologists' purchase of the Fort Harrison was based on personal profit motives.

Feb. 6—Charging he has blocked their First Amendment rights, the Scientologists file a \$1 million libel and civil rights suit against Cazares.

Feb. 11—The St. Petersburg Times Publishing Co. files suit seeking a permanent injunction to end alleged Scien-

May 3—Cazares and his wife drop libel and slander suits against the cult. Church spokesman Steven Heard said the dismissal was a sign that differences between the cult and Cazares could be settled.

May 5—Scientologists drop slander and libel suits against Cazares.

May 12—Cazares objects to Scientologists' attempt to drop the lawsuit against him, saying that would only be a temporary end to the dispute since the church could file the same suit again.

Aug. 3—Cazares charges the Church of Scientology wants to control Pinellas county and municipal governments and he asks Secretary of State Bruce Smathers to register the organization as a political committee.

Aug. 26—Church officials say they do not pay federal income taxes or state sales taxes, so they should not have to pay county property taxes. Pinellas County Property Appraiser Ron Schultz decided earlier that the church must pay about \$50,000 on its downtown Clearwater property.

Sept. 2—The church is denied tax exemptions on their two downtown properties.

Nov. 9—Cazares calls for increased security measures at city hall responding to the disclosure of an FBI investigation of Scientologist covert spying operations.

Dec. 28—The church files suit seeking tax-exempt status for its Clearwater property holdings for the second time.

1978

Jan. 2—Clearwater Scientologists admit they are looking for more property to purchase because the church needs additional space.

ologist harassment of Times' employees.

Feb. 27—Counter charging that the Scientologists are attempting to intimidate him and keep him from doing his job, Cazares files an \$8 million libel and slander suit against the Church.

March 1—The Scientologists file for a property tax exemption on the Fort Harrison and old Bank of Clearwater buildings.

March 18—Margaret Cazares, the mayor's wife, also files a \$1 million libel suit against the Scientologists.

March 24—The Scientologists file suit against Assistant City Editor Tom Coat and the Sun, charging that when Coat tried to enroll in a Scientology course, he caused members "extreme mental anguish, suffering and humiliation. Coat was expelled from their branch office in Tampa.

March 27—State Attorney James Russell confirms his office is investigating the Scientologists because of the secret purchase of the hotel.

June 15—Cazares's attorney, Patrick D. Doherty, hands the organization a list of questions that would solve many of the community's doubts. Among other things, the questions ask whether any member investigated Cazares or his wife. They also seek the names, salaries and purpose of the guards who regularly patrol the building and request an explanation of the method of securing financial support.

Nov. 11—Scientologist Church files a second \$1 million suit against the Sun and its editorial staff for libel and defamation.

Dec. 13—Scientologists attempt to block a move by Pinellas County tax officials to collect nearly \$54,600 in taxes on cult's downtown properties.

1977

Jan. 13—Scientologists request Russell release to them the records of his investigation undertaken in March on the purchase of the Fort Harrison. Lawyer for Cazares says the mayor's immune from libel charges because statements were made in his official capacity as mayor.

Feb. 12—Circuit Judge Charles M. Phillips dismissed Scientologist suit to force Russell to submit and release his investigative files on the cult and related organizations.

Feb. 19—Scientologists resist Cazares's efforts to learn about the cult's basic goals and theology in court.

March 27—Court documents involving Scientology suits show that in December 1975, after five months in Clearwater, the church took in more than \$173,000. During the last nine weeks of 1976, the church gathered \$862,437 and the cult expects to take in more than \$1.4 million. Scientologists contend Cazares's animosity toward them has cost them nearly \$38 million.

April 18—Circuit Judge Harry W. Fogle rules that to be considered for tax-exempt status, the church must tell Pinellas County how it spends its money. He says the church need not reveal the sources of its income.

April 27—The church gives Pinellas County records showing how the money is spent but the records are kept confidential under a court protective order. Fogle says it is up to the county to prove Scientology is not a nonprofit religion.

April 28—Judge Fogle decides Scientology is a religion but rules it must pay its 1976 property taxes. Fogle also rules that the Scientologists didn't provide enough information about their 1976 income for him to decide whether they are a nonprofit group.

July 19—The church files notice that it will appeal the Pinellas Circuit Court decision that it must pay about \$50,000 in county property taxes for 1976.

July 30—City Commissioner Richard Tenney charges that Scientologists using fictitious names have telephoned his home trying to get information about his accusation that the church was the site of drug activity. He demands an investigation.

Aug. 18—More than 300 totalitarians march along Cleveland Street to protest "a totalitarian justice department and religious genocide" because of the indictment of 11 Scientologists in Washington.

Aug. 19—The church files a Freedom of Information Act suit against the U.S. Justice Department to seek the release of information held at the FBI's Tampa office.

Sept. 9—The church is denied its third county property

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