

Scientology followers set big protest

By NELSON PICKETT
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Thousands of Scientologists, including actor John Travolta, are planning to flock to Portland this week to protest a \$39 million court judgment against the church, Scientology officials said Saturday.

Scientologists started their protest Saturday night with a march outside the Multnomah County Courthouse by about 150 persons carrying signs that read "Restore the Bill of Rights" and "We Want Justice" and chanting "religious freedom now."

Another rally is scheduled for 9:30 a.m. Sunday outside the courthouse in response to the jury finding that the church was guilty of defrauding former member Julie Cristofferson Titchbourne, the Rev. Kathleen Gorgon, California president of the church, said Saturday.

The Rev. Ken Hoden of the Portland office of the church also said a church service would be held at noon Sunday at the park across the street from the courthouse and a candlelight vigil was planned at the courthouse at dusk.

Hoden said the first of two flights of Scientologists arrived at Portland International Airport Saturday night. He estimated there were from 500 to 700 followers of the church from out of town in Portland Saturday night. He said that figure would climb to several thousand by Sunday.

Gorgon and John Carmichael, president of the Church of Scientology in Portland, said they did not know how many Scientologists would come to Portland.

Local religious leaders take issue with Scientologists' claim that the \$39 million court judgment is a threat to religious freedom. Page C3.

"There may be as many as 500,000 people coming," Carmichael said Saturday. "They've been calling all night from all over the world and all over the country."

Carmichael said Travolta and jazz musician Chick Corea, both of whom are Scientologists, would come to Portland to participate in peaceful protest demonstrations. He did not know when Travolta would arrive. Corea is scheduled to arrive in Portland from Tokyo at 2 p.m. Monday and will hold a free concert later in the day at a location yet to be determined.

Carmichael added that supporters from Holland, Sweden, Italy and Britain were flying to Portland, and that supporters from California and other nearby areas were streaming into the city in "vans, buses and trains" to protest the court verdict, which church officials have said threatens religious freedom.

Titchbourne, a 27-year-old Portland woman, first became involved with Scientology as a 17-year-old high school graduate from Eureka, Mont.

One of her lawyers said the judgment, reached Friday following a 10-week trial and 2½ days of deliberations by a Multnomah County Circuit Court jury, was the largest punitive-damages award in Oregon history.

Church officials have said they will appeal the verdict.

Gorgon, the California church official, said, "We consider (the jury verdict) a great injustice against religious freedom brought about by a small local court that decided religion as practiced by Scientologists is not protected by the guarantee of religious freedom as stated in the Constitution."

"We're trying to figure out how we can best let these people have their voices be heard," Carmichael said. "They are outraged at the outrageous, punitive assault leveled against the church for being a church in Oregon."

Carmichael said Saturday's demonstration in front of the Multnomah County Courthouse was hastily organized but included Scientologists who had flown to Portland from Los Angeles and Florida.

One Saturday evening demonstrator, Ove Bjerregaard said he arrived from Clearwater, Fla., earlier in the evening aboard a chartered jet. He said he worked for the Church of Scientology in Clearwater, as did several others who were interviewed by the press.

Bjerregaard said he traveled to Portland to protect his First Amendment rights.

Sporting a Florida tan, he said he was originally from Denmark and was not all that familiar with American government.

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