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Lid to blow on church's own volcano

By LESLEY COLLINS
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CLEARWATER — First there was Mount Vesuvius, then Mount St. Helens.

And now — Mount Fort Harrison.

The Church of Scientology's Clearwater headquarters is the site of an "active" volcano set to ooze molten lava — albeit the imitation kind — from a 20-foot fabrication towering above the hotel courtyard at 210 S. Fort Harrison Ave.

Mount Fort Harrison, set to spew its stuff around 9:30 p.m. today, is the grand finale of the sect's

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Sun staff photo by CHUCK DeLOACH

The volcano is set to spew about 9:30 tonight.

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anniversary celebration of the publication of "Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health," considered the Scientologists' foundational "scripture."

The book, whose cover is adorned with a picture of an erupting volcano, was written by late Scientology founder L. Ron Hubbard and published in May 1950.

"It's a prop," Scientology spokesman Ludwig Alpers said of the brown, cone-shaped mass rising near the hotel's expansive swimming pool.

After a live demonstration of dianetics auditing in the hotel's west auditorium, guests will spill over into the courtyard to watch the volcano do the same.

Clusters of time-delayed flares will give the image of molten lava frothing over the sides of the volcano's mouth, Alpers said.

Clearwater Fire Marshal Nick Lewis and Dave Christiansen, chief of building inspections, investigated the fake volcano Friday and came away satisfied permit-wise.

"That is a work of art," said

Lewis, who granted the Scientologists a fireworks permit Friday afternoon.

Bell Associates, the pyrotechnician in charge of the project, doesn't intend to shoot fireworks into the air, Lewis said. But the project required a permit because the materials involved are classified as fireworks.

Flares will be planted around the cone's fiber-clothed exterior, he said, and other devices will pump smoke through the opening at the top of the volcano.

Christiansen's only request was that the volcano's fiber covering be flame retardant.

Lewis said he had no problem with the volcano as long as tonight's wind gusts to no more than 10 mph.

If winds whip beyond the 10 mph mark, however, Scientologists would have to put a lid on the volcano eruption because smoke and any burning debris would be carried to surrounding properties, he said.

A National Weather Service forecaster in Ruskin said northeasterly winds are expected to bluster between 15 and 20 mph at midday today, but will probably die down after dusk.