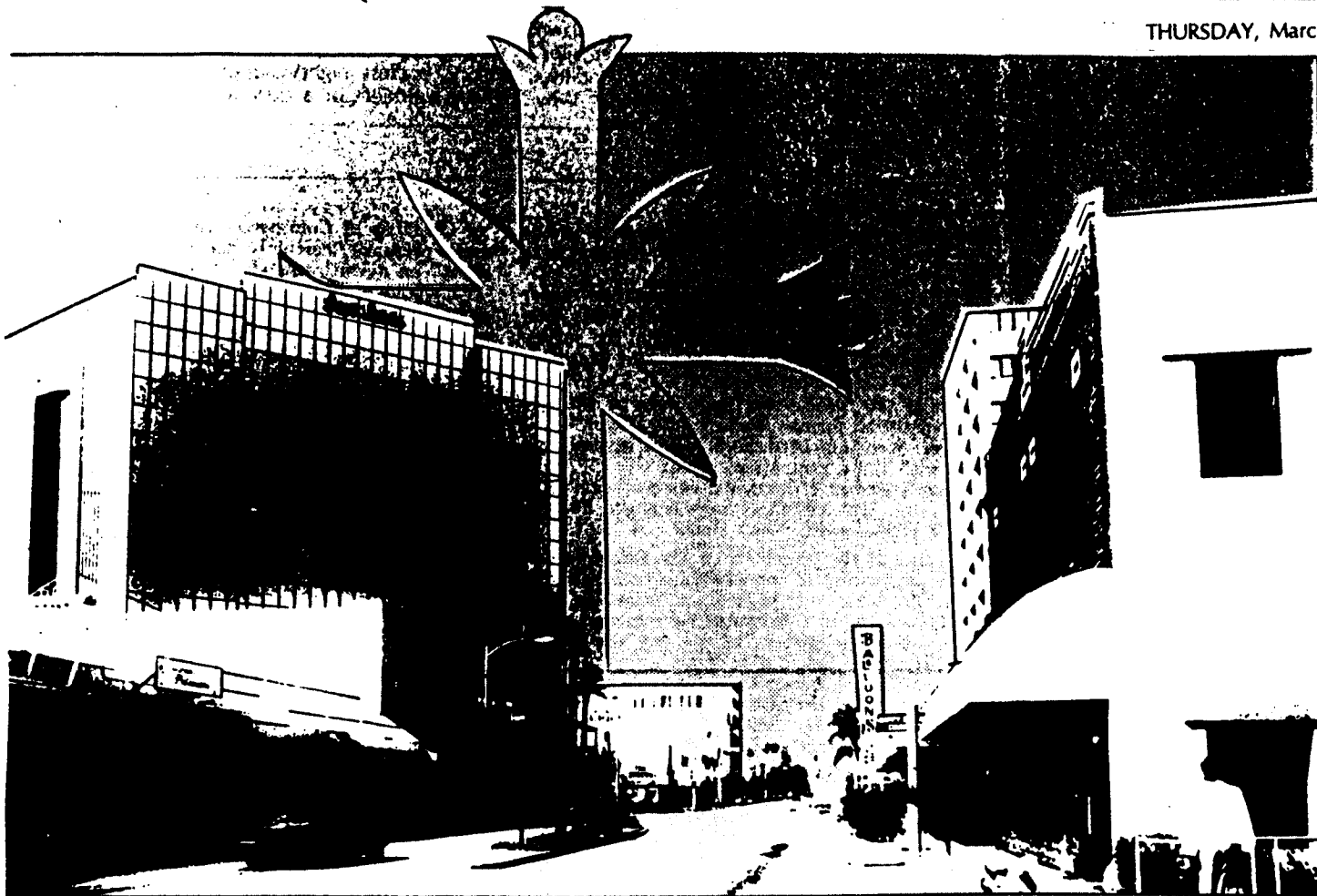


# Clearwater Sun

Northern Pinellas County's Local Daily

THURSDAY, March 3, 1988



Sun graphic by PAT KANE-PRESCOTT

Critics charge downtown Clearwater has deteriorated since the arrival of Scientology.

## Debate over sect fades

By DEBBIE LONG  
Sun staff writer

**CLEARWATER** — In 1975 the Church of Scientology, cloaked in secrecy, made this waterfront city its international headquarters.

A lengthy outcry ensued when the public became aware the sect — under another name — bought a Clearwater landmark, the Fort Harrison Hotel. The Scientologists subsequently bought many other parcels of downtown Clearwater property, posting guards to keep the curious at bay.

When the public and press asked questions about the aims of the Church of Scientology, sect leaders became mum about their intentions and sparred in court with elected officials and area newspapers.

The Church of Scientology, in trying to keep a low profile, instead cast a shadow of doubt across the city.

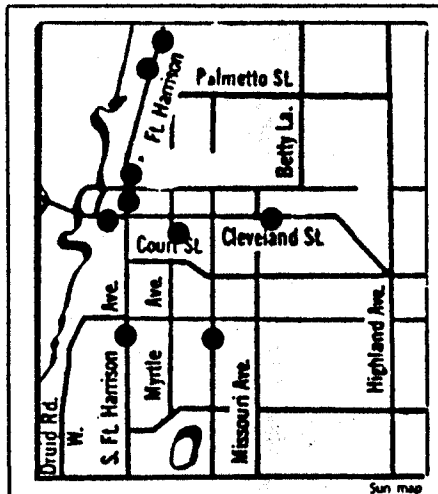
In recent years the controversy over Scientology has faded — by and large — from the public eye.

But some say the community's perception of the Church of Scientology hasn't changed much. Rather, it's simply no longer the popular topic it once was, according to observers.

Others believe a sense of "complacency" has developed over the years with the realization Scientologists were not going to make Clearwater a whistle-stop.

Mayor Rita Garvey said she believes many people in the community still feel much the same way today about the international organization as they did in 1975.

"The negative (feelings) are still there," she said in describing what she believes is the widely held view of the sect. "It's just



Sun map

### Scientology holdings

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But sect spokesman Richard Haworth disagrees that there is any measure of animosity toward the group today.

"I honestly don't think that's the situation," he said. "I think there have been people in the past who made a lot of noise. And that's been taken as the way people feel. But many (citizens) are quiet and don't feel that way."

Haworth recently talked at length about the sect's involvement in the community and its efforts to improve its public image through radio and television programs, including a Paragon cable show called the "Road to Freedom."

"I think most people are just curious," Haworth said.

Tampa Bay Business Journal editor Ron Stuart, who was managing editor of the Clearwater Sun when the sect arrived in town, said "people still have questions about what they do and what their intent is."

"As far as the perception of the people, I don't see much change. There is not as much animosity (now), but (Scientology leaders) still don't want any criticism."

"I think what a lot of people... have objected to is finding that (the sect) was buying up prime real estate and getting a tax break on it."

That has led to the continuing outcry by some residents and officials that the sect is not paying its fair share. Critics charge the Scientologists are buying downtown property and trying to take it off tax rolls by claiming religious exemption from taxation.

Pinellas County Property Appraiser

(Please see \* SCIENTOLOGY, next page)

## \* Scientology

(from page 1A)

Ron Shultz said Wednesday the tax status of the organization is currently pending in Pinellas County Circuit Court.

The group, which goes under the corporate name of Church of Scientology/Flag Service Organization Inc., filed suit in 1982 — and each subsequent year. The sect wants to be legally designated as a not-for-profit organization, which would allow it to be exempt from taxes, Shultz said.

"Our position is that they must establish that they are not-for-profit," which has not been done, Shultz said. "We believe the Church of Scientology/Flag Service Organization is merely an alter ego for the previous organization — Church of Scientology of California — which (a Pinellas County Circuit Court judge) did find taxable."

The organization owns 11 pieces of property in Clearwater, valued by the county appraiser's office at a total of \$21.5 million.

Fred Petty, assistant tax collector for the county, said Wednesday the sect currently owes about \$500,000 in back taxes, plus interest, dating back to 1982.

Haworth, meanwhile, continues to argue the public's perception of the sect has softened in recent years. He noted that in a recent Clearwater Library reader's poll, sect founder L. Ron Hubbard's "Dianetics — The Modern Science of Mental Health" was named the fifth most "influential" book in Clearwater.

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However, Clearwater librarian Linda Melinke

said "Dianetics" was not ranked as such in the survey. The books mentioned by readers were not ranked, she said.

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Cazares was in office when the sect arrived in Clearwater. His criticisms have changed little, if any, in recent years.

"I think at the present time, the Scientologists are in the process of consolidating their occupancy of Clearwater without a fight," Cazares said.

"The citizens of Clearwater have given up."

Some business owners in the city are not opposed to the Scientologists in the area.

Lillian Trickel, owner of Trickel's Jewelers and a member of the Downtown Development Board, said she believes the Scientologists have neither hurt nor helped business in the area.

"As far as I am concerned, they are fine," she said. "They do not bother me... they hardly speak to you. We have less crime because they are here at all hours of the night, and they notify police whenever they see mischief."

Mrs. Trickel said she doesn't think the group's presence is a deterrent to prospective businesses locating in the area.

But Parker Stafford, president of the Clearwa-

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"I would rather have a vibrant, growing, dynamic business located in downtown Clearwater," he said.

Jim Carpenter, executive director of the Clearwater Downtown Development Board, said the presence of the Church of Scientology is a double-edged sword.

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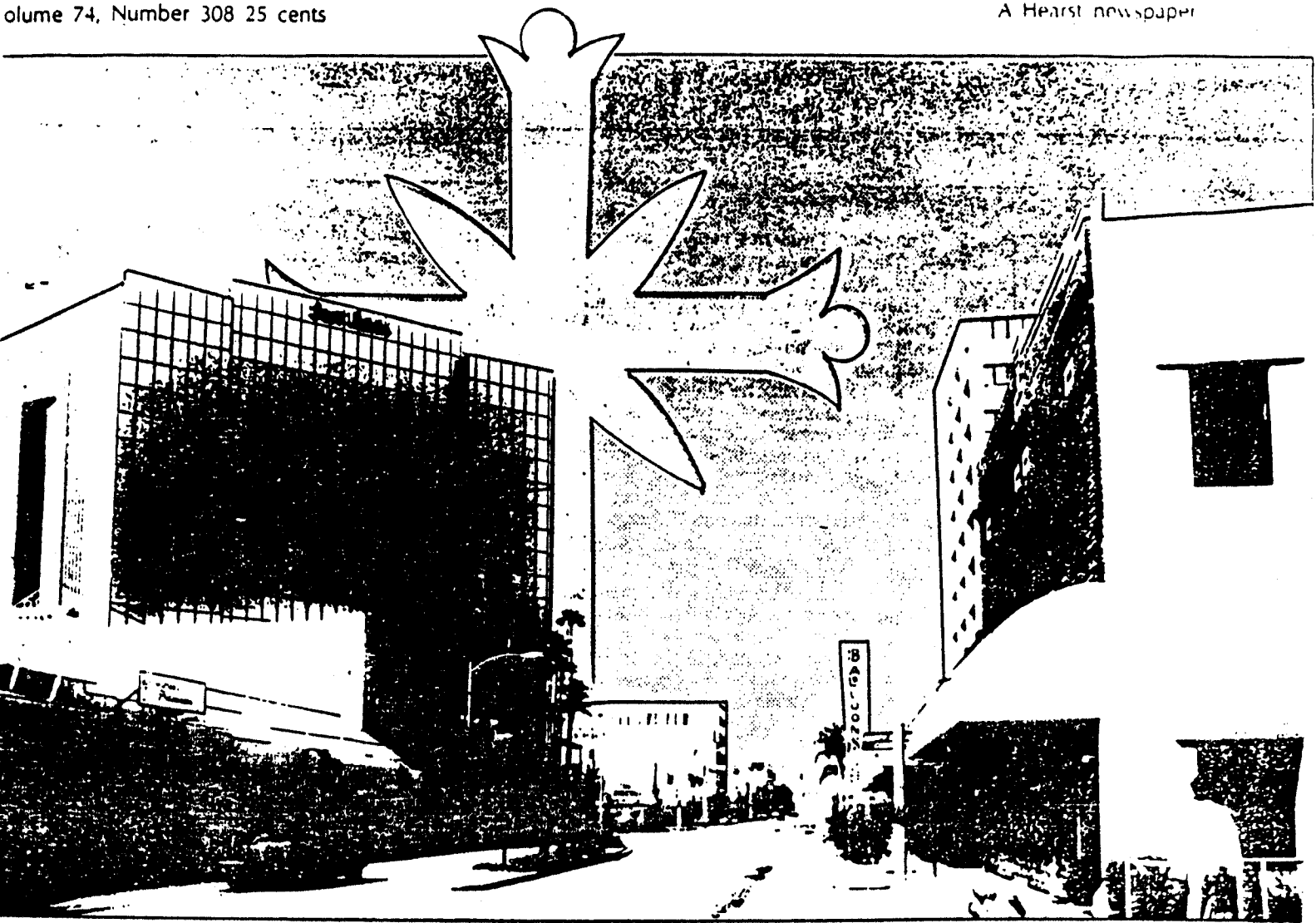
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"I think in many ways (now), people have thrown in the towel," he said. "(The organization) is so assimilated in the area. There has been a complacency that developed."

For his part, Haworth said the Church of Scientology "has been a part of the community for 13 years.

"We enjoy being part of the community," he added, "and plan to continue."



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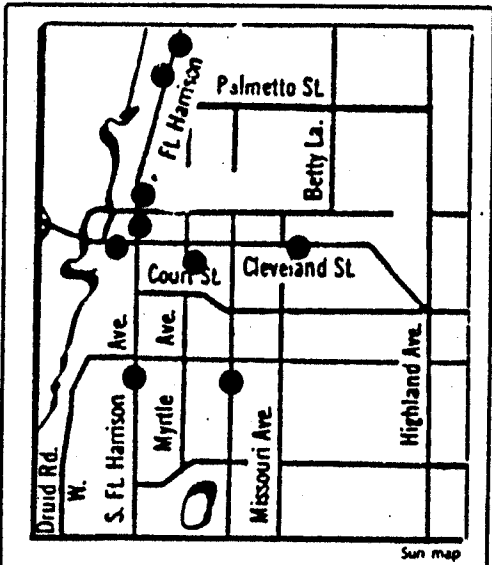
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