

Scientology's Changing Strategy...**Confront Controversy, Gain Converts,  
And Make Money**By Stephen Koff  
St. Petersburg Times

CLEARWATER, FLA. - After years of sparring with the townsfolk and veiling itself in secrecy, the Church of Scientology has succeeded in turning Clearwater into its spiritual mecca. Scientologists quietly run teen nightclubs, schools, day-care centers, management consulting firms and other businesses, records and interviews show.

Now the strategy of the organization, longtime observers say, is to confront controversy, gain converts and make money - lots of it. Scientology's Clearwater operation brings in \$1.5-million to \$2-million a week, say church watchers who include Clearwater police, former Scientology security chief Richard Azneran and former Scientologist-turned-author Bent Corydon.

Fee schedules show how the dollars add up: 12 1/2 hours of basic Scientology counseling in Clearwater costs \$8,000, not counting meals and accommodations.

Scientology brochures boast that Clearwater has the "largest community of Scientologists in the world," with more than 1,000 Scientologists served by "several hundred" staff members.

Authorities cannot confirm those numbers, but the claim itself is a dramatic change from the secretive Scientology of 1975, when the organization used an assumed name - United Churches of Florida, Inc. - to buy the Fort Harrison Hotel for \$2.3-million in cash. Armed guards ringed the downtown hotel, and for weeks the church would not reveal its true identity.

The stealthy move was followed by deep suspicion between the Scientologists and community leaders. Church documents seized by the FBI later would show that Scientologists tried to frame then-Mayor Gabe Cazares with a hit-and-run accident, and Bette Orsini, a St. Petersburg Times investigative reporter, was targeted as a Scientology "enemy" and harassed.

But some things have changed in 13 years - among them the way Scientology presents itself.

"It's obvious that there's some effort to be less visible, in terms of either making attacks on people or in terms of making more of a splash around here," said Jim Sheeler, Clearwater's community development manager.

"They want to be part of the community," said C. David Carley, Jr., chairman of the Citizens Bank of Clearwater. "And you cannot blame them for that."

Scientology officials, most notably spokesman Richard Haworth, are frequent guests on local radio shows and a prime-time staple of Vision Cable's

community access channel. "They have a public relations campaign to present themselves as the person you work with, your friend, or the person next door," said Randy Kabrich, programming director for Q105-FM, a station on which Haworth has denounced Scientology's detractors. "And I am not aware of any other religious group, cult or non-cult, that has gone to that extent."

Scientology officials and their lawyers would not comment for this series of articles. Asked again for comment (after last week's story first appeared) chief Scientology counsel Earle C. Cooley of Boston said, "The article that appeared... is the most vicious and malicious perversion of the truth that I have seen in 32 years."

Suprised  
by sponsors

Sometimes, it's hard to tell when the Scientologists are involved in an event or promotion. Some visitors say they were invited to Clearwater by innocuous-sounding groups that turned out to be promoting Scientology principles or programs.

*For instance, leaders of American Indian tribes were brought to the Fort Harrison in February (1988) by the Concerned Businessmen's Association of America. Their invitations mentioned programs for drug and alcohol abuse prevention, but said nothing about Scientology, according to Indians who received them.*

*The Concerned Businessmen's Association, based in Glendale, Calif., is a group of Scientologists.*

*"I thought it was going to be a group of concerned businessmen who had money to help Indian tribes," said Raymond Reyes, then executive director of the Coeur d'Alene tribe in Idaho and now director of Indian education at Gonzaga University. "I thought it was going to be a group of fundees who could meet funding sources. Instead, it was all this L. Ron Hubbard stuff."*

The Concerned Businessmen's Association did not respond to repeated calls and a letter from the St. Petersburg Times.

U.S. Rep. Floyd Flake, D-N.J., accepted a trip to attend a black history and arts seminar at the Fort Harrison last year. He said he thought the sponsoring group was called Celebration of the Arts.

"We did not know it was Scientology," said Flake's press aide Edwin Reed, who also attended. "We didn't really realize that, but with L. Ron Hubbard's (pictures) all around, (we thought), 'What in the heck is this?'"

Taxes and  
public relations

That's a question many Clearwater residents are still trying to answer, despite Scientologists' attempts to fade into the mainstream. Former mayor Cazares said, "Just the fact that they're

quiet doesn't mean that they're not active. The nature of the beast has not changed."

Longtime residents "still believe that something is going on," said current Mayor Rita Garvey. "The general public is still leery and would like to see them out of town, which of course is not a reality, but the public's still concerned."

So are Pinellas government officials. The City of Clearwater and the church are in the midst of a five-year legal fight over an ordinance that, if enforced, would require Scientology to disclose extensive information about its finances. The church says the law is unconstitutional.

Then there's Scientology's tax bill; with more than \$21-million in assessed property, the Church of Scientology is the biggest property owner in downtown Clearwater. Since moving to Clearwater, the organization has assembled 12 properties on nine parcels of land. It hasn't paid property taxes since 1981, and its tax bill to date stands at \$2.84-million, said O. Sanford Jasper, Pinellas tax collector.

Pinellas Property Appraiser Ron Schultz argues that Scientology should have to pay the taxes. To that end,

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County Attorney Susan Churuti said in court documents that the church's Clearwater operation is merely an "alter ego" of California-run Scientology operations - which, according to a federal judge, helped enrich the group's founder, L. Ron Hubbard. The Pinellas tax battle may be settled in court in 1989, said Circuit Judge Howard P. Rives.

Several years ago, the church offered to pay its tax bill in a display of public spirit - as long as the money was considered a "gift" rather than a tax. But Schultz said he was in office to assess taxes, not gifts. He declined the offer, and insisted on calling taxes just that: taxes.

#### Community Influence

While the church presses its tax case in the courts, it continues to extend its influence in the community and court public opinion. The church's own publications reinforce the theme of a community-minded public relations strategy.

The Scientology magazine Impact recently recycled this message from group founder Hubbard: Hit for the key sports by whatever means, the head of the women's club, the personnel director of a company, the leader of a good orchestra, the president's secretary, the advisor of the trade union - any key spot. Make a good sound living at it, drive a good car, but get your job done, handle and better the people you meet and bring about a better earth."

Scientologists hold key spots in a variety of ventures around Pinellas, and several private businesses in Clearwater - Snow Software, Arlene's Child-care and Making Magic, Inc., a distributor of velvet art, among them - are run by church members, according to a Scientology directory. These businesses' owners would not talk to a reporter, saying their religion has no public relevance.

Three Clearwater enterprises, however, have stronger ties to the church: True School, Jefferson Academy and Singer Consultants.

True School, at 1831 Drew St., and Jefferson Academy, 1740 N. Highland Ave., are "private "Hubbard Method" schools that use an approach developed by Scientology's founder.

Vivian Godfrey, one of two teachers at Jefferson, said that "Hubbard educational technology deals only with education... The school has absolutely no connection with the Church of Scientology."

Ms. Godfrey and the other teacher, Sandy Mesmer, are listed as "participating members of the Church of Scientology" in Who's Here?, a directory of church members around Tampa Bay.

As for True School, an advertisement in Who's Here? lists "child auditing" among the school's programs. Auditing, a form of counseling, is the

basis of Scientology practice. True School officials did not respond to a reporter's requests for an interview.

Singer Consultants, 1001 S. Myrtle Ave., is a management consulting firm catering to chiropractors. Like California-based Sterling Management Consultants (dentists) and Uptrends of New Hampshire (computer professionals), Singer is licensed by Scientology to teach Hubbard "management technology." Marketing, billing and staff development are emphasized and clients say Scientology is touted as a self-improvement option.

Singer managers did not return a reporter's calls, but last year said they don't recruit for the church. However, a recent Singer advertisement in a directory of Scientologists said that "more people have been moved onto and up the Bridge" - a term referring to fulfilling Scientology's goals - "by this group than any other in history, and this is just the beginning."

#### Elsewhere

##### around Clearwater:

Muriel McKay, once a Scientology public affairs official, serves on the executive committee of the Pinellas County Republican Party and represents a Clearwater voting precinct.

"She conducts herself admirably," said Edric Kennedy, the GOP's parliamentarian. "She is officious, she is not pushy, she is a really good member." Ms. McKay did not respond to several telephone messages from a reporter seeking her comment.

The teen nightclubs Off Limits, in Clearwater and Brandon, are owned and operated by a partnership of at least two Scientologists. Off Limits serves no alcohol and "provides a safe place for kids to have fun," said part owner LaVonna Applebaum.

County licenses and state corporate records show that the partnership that owns the clubs is named Tone 40 Limited. "Tone 40" is a term distinctive to Scientology: it is the ultimate level on Scientology's "tone scale" of existence, which runs from 0.1, for dying, to 40, for "serenity of beingness," according to the Dianetics and Scientology Technical Dictionary.

"The church has absolutely no connection with the business, just as the Catholic Church has no connection with businesses owned by members of that church," said Ray Cassano, listed on state records as the sole director of Tone 40 Limited.

Richie Stone, 18, is a former bouncer at the Clearwater club, 14100 U.S. 19 S. He said Ms. Applebaum used to tell employees, "Why don't you all go to the classes with us? It's good for your attitudes. It's good for your tempers."

Ms. Applebaum said, "Quite frankly, if I can find a way to help somebody, I try to help - if they ask for it. If they did not ask for help, I would not offer it."

Stone said he did not seek that advice.