

# New drug clinic splinters Oklahoma town

## Scientology-affiliated treatment center alarms Newkirk residents

By Arnold Hamilton

Oklahoma Bureau of The Dallas Morning News

NEWKIRK, Okla. — The people of this farming hamlet near the Oklahoma-Kansas border thought the idea was the perfect tonic for their rural economic ills.

Out-of-state investors offered to take over the abandoned Chilocco Indian School and transform it into a major drug and alcohol treatment center. They signed a 25-year lease — worth an estimated \$16 million — with the five tribes that control the campus. They brought expecta-

tions of new jobs and increased business for the area.

Now, only seven months after state officials approved a license for the facility, the euphoria in Newkirk has evaporated. It has been supplanted by fears that the Narconon New Life Center is a front for the controversial Church of Scientology.

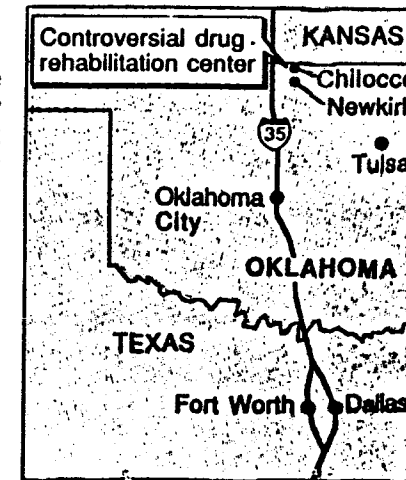
"It's real hard to differentiate Narconon from the religion of Scientology," said the Rev. Mark Jones, pastor of First Baptist Church in Newkirk.

"In fact, a directive I saw out of

one of their publications said the purpose of Narconon and their other organizations was to bring people up the bridge or over the bridge into Scientology. They need to be aboveboard about that."

Instead, many Newkirk residents say, Narconon officials have ducked and dodged when asked to clarify the 23-year-old organization's ties to the Church of Scientology, founded in 1952 by science-fiction writer L. Ron Hubbard.

"They have not leveled with us on everything," said Newkirk. Please see OKLAHOMA on Page 8A.



The Dallas Morning News

# Oklahoma residents fear being labeled a 'cult town'

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Mayor Garry Bilger.

"We just want to find out what Narconon's overall objective is. Is it what they say it is — drug and alcohol rehabilitation? Or is it an effort to prolong the cult of Scientology?"

Narconon spokesman Gary Smith confirmed that many of the program's staff members, including himself, are Scientologists and that some treatment methods were devised by the late Mr. Hubbard.

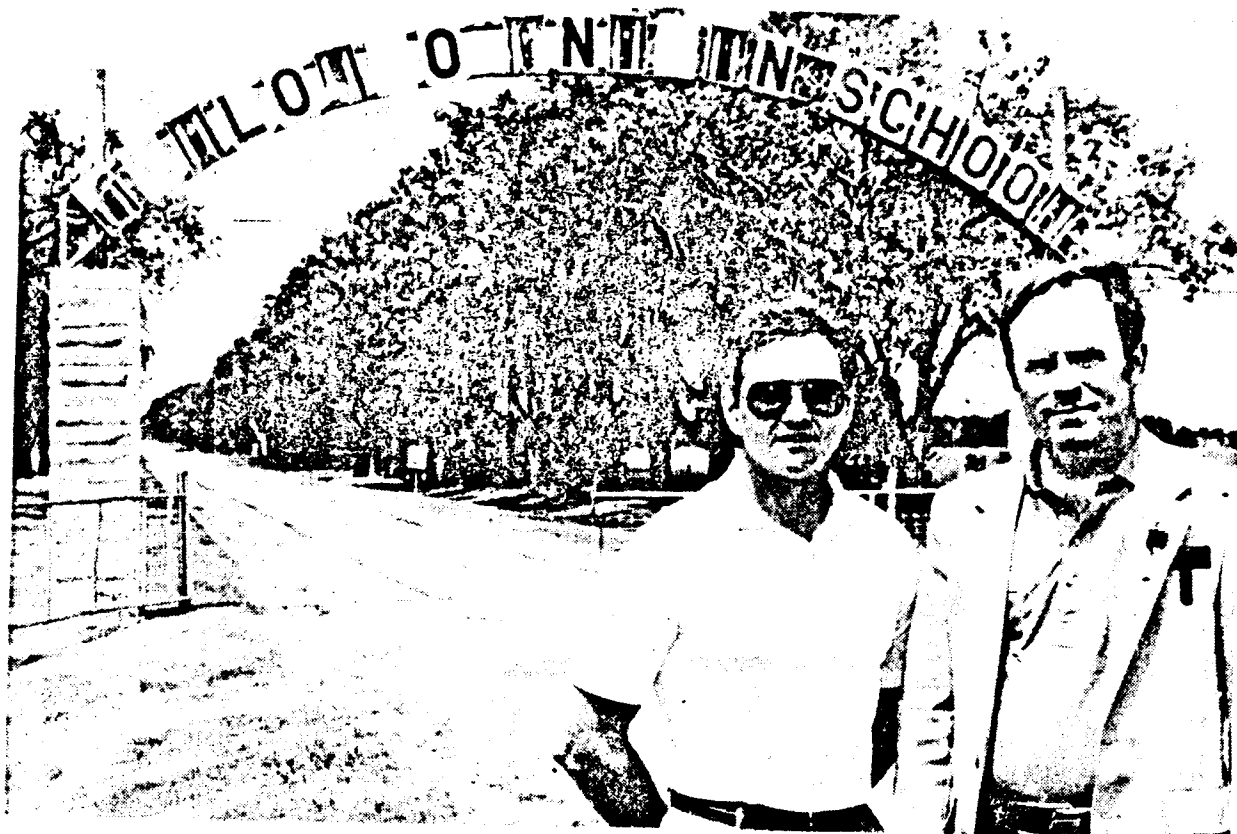
He also said many Scientologists, acting as individuals, have supported Narconon financially since its 1966 inception as an inmate substance abuse program at the Arizona State Penitentiary.

But Mr. Smith denied that Narconon is a subsidiary of the Church of Scientology or that it uses its treatment programs to help convert patients to the religion.

"They don't run Narconon and they don't give us money, although I can't say that if they did that I would turn it down," he said.

"It's not our right or job or purpose to dictate any religious affiliation. . . . Whatever a person chooses to worship, we encourage that, so long as it's not something negative like Satan worship."

The controversy has been swirling here since April 27 when the town's weekly newspaper, the *Newkirk Herald Journal*, first revealed the possible ties between Narconon and the Church of Scien-



The Rev. Mark Jones of the First Baptist Church (left) and the Rev. Mike Clifton of the First Christian Church oppose a Newkirk, Okla., drug treatment center that town residents say is linked to the Church of Scientology.

Associated Press

tology.

Since then, the treatment center has been a topic of intense debate on street corners, in Mother's Family Cafe on Main Street and in the

town's mainline Christian churches.

In addition, the *Herald Journal* has published an almost weekly series of stories about the proposed fa-

cility, Narconon and the Church of Scientology. Mayor Bilger, Rev. Jones and newspaper publisher Robert W. Lobsinger said they have received dozens of letters and tele-

phone calls from people across North America warning them about Narconon and the Church of Scientology and their potential impact on Newkirk.

As a result, the scheduled September opening of the 75-bed facility has emerged as perhaps the most controversial event in the history of this town of 2,400, located about 110 miles north of Oklahoma City.

It is so disturbing, in fact, that several residents declined to be quoted, apparently fearing retribution from an organization that remains mysterious to them.

Some said fears were heightened when the treatment center hired a

private investigator from Stillter, Okla., to help identify the participants in what Narconon's Smith described as a "whisper campaign. The investigator was told to find out who distributed private Narconon materials to staffers.

"There is a fear that it is a front to recruit for their church said Jana Shafer, the local school board president. "I'd like to be proven wrong, but all the information we've received doesn't indicate that.

"We're a very careful community and we want what's best. Please see NARCONON on Page 9.

