

# Scientology is back at City Hall

## Clearwater commissioners discuss church's influence

■ Phillies sign spring-training deal with city. **Page 3**

By **CURTIS KRUEGER**  
Times Staff Writer

**CLEARWATER** — City commissioners presided over a debate Thursday on a thorny topic that had not raged in City Hall for years — whether the Church of Scientology helps or hurts Clearwater.

And in a side issue, a Scientology official said the organization would rather renovate its existing buildings in downtown Clearwater and possibly consolidate them, rather than buy more local land.

The organization owns 12 parcels, mostly in downtown Clearwater, worth more than \$21-million.

A Scientology planning official said the organization also planned some renovations of the former Bank of Clearwater building in the 500 block of Cleveland Street.

There were two discussions of Scientology during Thursday's commission meeting. The first came during a portion of the meeting in which residents are allowed to address the commissioners on items not on the agenda.

A group of former Scientologists told commissioners that the organization is a cult and said the public deserves to know more.

But Scientologists said their organization is a benevolent one that helps its members and the city.

It was one of the few long debates in City Hall on the Scientologists since the early 1980s, when the commission had a series of hearings to investigate the organization's activities in Clearwater.

The international organization has its spiritual headquarters in Clearwater and bases its teachings on the writings of the late L. Ron Hubbard, author of *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*.

The former Scientologists were prompted to speak because commissioners were scheduled to discuss a site plan for a new \$3.5-million building the organization plans to build at the Sandcastle Motel, 200 N Osceola Ave.

But commissioners did not consider the debate when discussing the site plan. They said the site-plan discussion should center only on whether the plan conformed with Clearwater's land-development code. That discussion occurred later in the meeting.

Commissioners voted to refer the site plan to the city staff for review. The final site plan must come back to the commission for a final vote.

The issue took up about 45 minutes of commission

Please see **SCIENTOLOGY** Page 11

# Scientology

from Page 1

time. When the discussion became repetitive, Mayor Rita Garvey's patience appeared to be wearing thin.

"Unfortunately the City Commission meeting has just been used," said Bill Daugherty, spokesman for the Scientologists.

"By both sides," Garvey said.

The former Scientologists made these allegations:

■ One man, Terry Prueher of Tampa, said he quit a job at Gener-



DAUGHERTY

al Motors to join the Scientologists and said he was promised \$10,000 for work he planned to do for the organization. But he said he never received the money. He also said he was robbed and injured after leaving the organization. But he didn't offer evidence that Scientologists were to blame.

"The hard core of Scientology is criminal," he said.

■ "I think it's a damaging cult," said Lisa Hyatt of St. Petersburg.

She said she was a member for a year and during that time, she said she got about two hours of sleep per night. She said that the organization altered her ability to perceive things normally and that she was having trouble even focusing on the commissioners' faces.

She urged city officials to learn as much about the organization as possible.

"It will get somebody you know

sooner or later," she said.

■ "I don't have anything good to say about Scientology, because I lost a sister to Scientology," said Joann Davis of Tampa. Because her sister was heavily involved in Scientology activities, the two lost touch. But now the sister is out of the organization, she said.

■ Margery Wakefield of Tampa, who helped organize the group, said she is willing to talk to anyone with questions about Scientology. She has spoken out against Scientology despite a court order in which she agreed not to discuss some aspects of the organization.

Scientologists, all from Clear-



WAKEFIELD

water, painted a much different picture:

■ Shannon Kern said she has convinced two friends to stop abusing drugs by introducing them to Scientology. "Scientology really does work, and it really does help me and my family," she said.

■ Marlo Kimmel said Scientology has helped her personally and professionally. She said she runs three businesses and has managed to form a meaningful relationship with her mother.

■ Steve Littler, who said he has been a Scientologist since childhood, said he has never heard of Scientologists engaging in the kinds of questionable practices that the critics described. He called Scientology "a gentle religion."

■ Mark Gould said he found the criticisms of his religion repulsive. "You would find it kind of awkward to be a Christian standing, defending your religion."