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SPECIAL REPORT

Mainstreaming Scientology



Photo by Chuck Kowal

In Royal Oak, the Church of Scientology operates out of this building on Fourth Street downtown. Inset: L. Ron Hubbard, founder.

Pilot dies in crash

Ridge man built plane

A Pleasant Ridge man was killed Saturday when his home-built airplane crashed in Waterford Township after taking off from Oakland-Pontiac Airport.

Henry "Fred" Feil, 54, was flying his Model BD-5 plane when it stalled at an altitude of about 100 feet and crashed in a vegetable field near the airport at about 3:50 p.m., according to Officer Robert Johnson, Waterford police.

The plane, powered by a rear propeller, crumbled on impact.

Mr. Feil's son, Rudolf Hein of Pleasant Ridge, described his father as an excellent pilot who became licensed to fly in 1972.

Mr. Feil, who was employed as a pipefitter for Ford Motor Co., also liked to fly a single-engine Piper out of Oakland-Troy Airport, said his son.

Hein said the BD-5 plane was approved for flying by the Federal

Church looks for its niche in the community

By Julie Edgar
Staff Writer

Church of Scientology members hawking free "personality tests" used to be a common sight on Main Street in Royal Oak.

That was before the church moved from its previous location at the corner of Main and Third streets to a building at Williams and Fourth streets a year ago.

The 300-member church's success in transforming its image from a fringe element to a responsible civic organization has gained it a place in the community, yet many people remain unfamiliar with church practices and purposes.

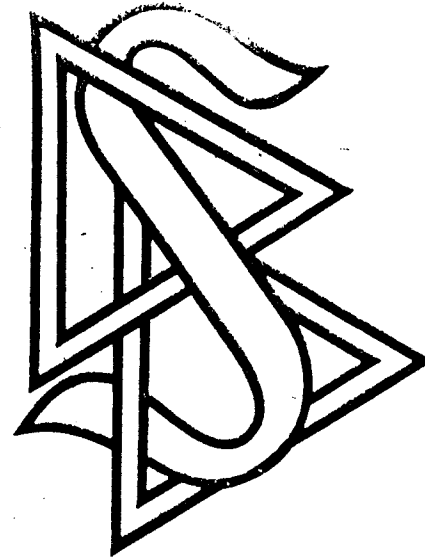
As the local church establishes itself, its spokesperson, members, an ex-member, academicians and others discuss their assessments of its value to followers and society in general.

"We still (solicit) occasionally, but I monitor it a little bit more because I have to make sure everybody's in the area they're legally supposed to be in, staff member Debbie Blair, 30. I'm learning what different ordinances are here in Royal Oak."

Jean Chamberlain, executive director of the Chamber of Commerce, says she has heard few complaints lately about sidewalk solicitations and even praises the church for its community involvement.

During April's "Spring Out," members of the church "ran games and lugged cases of pop," Chamberlain says. "They weren't up here trying to recruit."

Despite the retreat from overt



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recruiting tactics, the personality test — one in an arsenal of methods for attracting people to the church — is still around for "determining the best needs of an indi-

Church facts

The Church of Scientology, according to its own statistics, appeals most strongly to members of these groups:

- The majority of members in the Church of Scientology are between the ages of 21 and 30.
- The majority of members are involved in the Church of Scientology for one to seven years.
- The majority of members have a secondary education, which is defined as basic schooling up to college or university.
- Most members are from what is designated as a "middle class" background.
- Most members are Christian, (which inexplicably does not include Roman Catholic), with the fewest raised as Baptists.
- Most members are single.

According to a recent Scientology bulletin:

- The number of active Scientology memberships in 1987 increased 75 percent over the 1986 total.

These statistics are contained in the church's 1978 text, *What is Scientology?* Debbie Blair, a staff member at Royal Oak's Church of Scientology, says these figures are being updated.

vidual," Blair says.

Those "needs" might lead to enrollment in one of the 80-100 Scientology courses offered in everything from making a mar-

riage work to balancing a check-book. The fees for the courses start at \$80, according to Blair, who was the only staff person formally permitted to talk to *The Daily Tribune*.

"Say it (the personality test) shows a person is depressed. Then they might take the *Ups and Downs of Life* course," Blair explains.

But some people question the therapeutic value of these "life improvement" courses and Dianetics training, which is based on founder L. Ron Hubbard's 1950 text *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*.

Dianetics is the philosophy put forth in Hubbard's book. It served as the seed for Scientology — an "applied religious philosophy" — which incorporated as a non-profit organization in 1952. Its first church was established in Los Angeles in 1954.

Richard Burke, a philosophy professor at Oakland University, is concerned that Scientology and Dianetics are based "pseudo-scientific" claims put forth by Hubbard.

He explains that several years ago he attended a meeting with a neighbor who belonged to the church and was dismayed at the crowd.

"I thought there was a number of people there who had serious psychological problems. They needed a good therapist and there they were getting a treatment based on pseudo-knowledge."

Another Oakland University professor shares a similar view.

Gary Shepherd, a sociologist whose area of expertise is contem-

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Church is looking for its place in community

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porary religious movements, believes the appeal of Scientology "may very well reflect a set of modern concerns with its emphasis on a kind of pseudo-scientific approach that would be congenial to people in the 20th century . . . It seems to appeal to people who have an orientation to magical thinking."

By "magical thinking," Shepherd says, he means the idea that supernatural forces can be tapped "to bring about desired, tangible outcomes."

He cites the belief in reincarnation — Scientologists believe past lives can be "called up" in the course of therapy — as one manifestation of this kind of thinking.

Moreover, Shepherd says he is concerned that the procedure for tapping into higher forces is so detailed in terms of what it's supposed to accomplish. "If you go through this process you are promised certain outcomes," he explains. "Anybody must know that such claims are not based in reality."

A spiritual pinnacle known as a "state of Clear" is a central objective for members of the church and

the path leading toward it is long, arduous and quite expensive, even if Scientology is "common-sensical," as one staff member put it.

Alan Kellman, a 44-year-old Oxford attorney who has been a member of the Church of Scientology for 15 years, would not reveal precisely how much he spends each year giving and receiving courses, a practice known as auditing. "Sometimes it's a few hundred, sometimes a few thousand."

Church donations are not mandatory, Kellman notes, "but you must donate when you take a course. It is a set amount and is mandatory."

In July 1988, the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Cincinnati overturned a U.S. Tax Court rejection of a Scientology member's request for deductions on his donations. The Royal Oak man donated more than \$9,000 to the church in a two-year period.

While fees for life improvement courses are set, students often go on to become auditors, or counselors, in Scientology and Dianetics, which is even more expensive.

Sometimes students must take prerequisite courses. The *Student Hat* class, for example, teaches a person to maximize study time.

That course costs \$484 for members and \$605 for non-members, according to a recent fee schedule issued by the Royal Oak church.

Grade O-IV auditing levels, known as the "lower bridge" in the Scientology argot, cost \$1,355 each. Members must cross this bridge to get to the "upper bridge" of enlightenment.

According to an ex-staff member of the church who provided the fee schedule, students who audit Dianetics and Scientology are subject to all sorts of "digressions," which make the pursuit lengthier and even more expensive.

Trips to the "ethics officer," she says, are not uncommon for students who come under suspicion by church authorities. If the problem is minor, the student goes back to complete the level.

Finally, there is the E-Meter, a central tool in Dianetics and Scientology counseling.

Auditors may use the meter, but only ministers and those in ministerial training are permitted to own the device, which ranges in price from \$350 to \$3,000.

The E-Meter is fitted with two metallic "cans" and a dial. A student's answers to questions asked by a counselor are registered on

the dial and are supposed to reveal spots of emotional distress from either this life or a previous one.

An artfully produced Scientology film called *The Married Couple* demonstrates how the meter works. After a series of pointed questions by a concerned-looking minister, like "What have you done to Greg?" and "What have you withheld from Lauren?" the meter registers upsets, secrets or some other barrier to truth. In the process, each spouse comes to see the problem and the marriage is restored.

Besides pastoral counseling, ministers perform weddings, funerals and christenings and lead non-sectarian Sunday services.

Professor Shepherd believes Scientologists "usually disclaim being a religion in an orthodox sense" precisely because they base many of their beliefs on Hubbard's "scientific discoveries."

Yet, the church remains exempt from paying taxes because it is classified as a religious organization.

None of this poses a terrible contradiction to church members. Most are as assured as Blair, who maintains that Scientology is the fastest-growing religion in the world.



Photo by Chuck Kowal

Debbie Blair, a spokesperson for the Church of Scientology in Royal Oak, considers herself a Catholic and a member of the Church of Scientology.