

State Worker Linked To Narconon Promoter

Mental Health Staffer's Activities Probed

By Randy Ellis and Michael McNutt Staff Writers

As an employee of the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health, Leroy Bridges "actively lobbied" his colleagues in support of Narconon International's proposed drug treatment center near Newkirk, a memo states.

Meanwhile, Bridges had ties to a consulting firm hired by Narconon International to help that controversial drug treatment organization in its application for a certificate of need from the Oklahoma Health Planning Commission.

Bridges denies any wrongdoing, but his activities are being probed by federal investigators.

Records on file in the Oklahoma Secretary of State's office show that Bridges filed a document June 6, 1988, in which he applied to reserve the name Treatment Development Corporation.

Treatment Development Corp. was hired by Narconon International to help the Los Angeles-based firm with its certificate of need application, according to both Bridges and Sherry Barry, a Norman woman who heads Treatment Development Corp.

The proposed treatment center has been controversial because of Narconon's links to the Church of Scientology, which some people consider a cult.

Bridges acknowledged reserving the name Treatment Development Corporation, but said he did not have any direct connection with the consulting firm.

"If you'll look at the documents, you'll see that the corporation and everything was set up for Sherry," Bridges said. "She set it up. Since I'm

at the Capitol Building, I've done this for several people — check a name. I just reserved the name until she could set it up."

Barry also denied that Bridges, whom she described as a friend, has any role with the company which is operated out of her Norman apartment.

However, attorney Richard Mildren, who is listed as service agent for Treatment Development Corporation, said he agreed to serve in that capacity at the request of Bridges, whom he described as a friend.

Mildren said Bridges also apparently signed him up to serve as service agent for Narconon International.

Mildren said he knew almost nothing about either corporation and didn't even know he was listed as the service agent for Narconon International until he received a notice from the Oklahoma Tax Commission.

Mildren said a senior partner in his law firm has asked him to withdraw as Narconon's registered agent and he is trying to take that action.

Mildren said he did not know if Bridges received money for his actions in behalf of Narconon or Treatment Development Corporation. Bridges said he was not paid.

Both Barry and Bridges attended a ceremony in April at the old Chilocco Indian School with Narconon and tribal officials associated with the Chilocco Development Authority.

Bridges was listed as vice chairman of the Oklahoma Cultural Diversity and Economic Development Task Force and a member of the founding board of Red Earth Inc., while Barry was listed as being with Treatment Development Corporation.



Leroy Bridges

Opposition to the facility began a month later when a Newkirk newspaper editor published articles linking Narconon to the Church of Scientology.

During a public hearing held in May by Newkirk city officials, Bridges, along with Howard Miles, a member of the Health Planning Commission, tried to calm residents' fears about the Narconon facility.

Bridges said Narconon's drug treatment plan was based on philosophies of Church of Scientology founder L. Ron Hubbard, but said he found the plan to be acceptable and added it would have to be certified by the state Department of Mental Health before Narconon could open.

Although Bridges presented for Newkirk residents a positive view of Narconon, such views were not universal within the Mental Health Department.

Steve West, director of the alcohol and drug abuse division of the Department of Mental Health, had expressed strong opposition to Narconon's proposed treatment center in an Oct. 18, 1988, memo to J. Frank James, who was

then mental health commissioner.

West cited Narconon's relationship with the Church of Scientology and stated, "As I understand it, Narconon will allow indigent clients to work off their bill. The Indians they are supposed to be helping could become indentured servants."

"I have heard they want to start with 150 beds and eventually go to 1,000. This is a factory, not a center."

"Narconon has never been certified as a treatment program in California where they currently operate," he said.

"Although Leroy Bridges has been favorably impressed with this program and actively lobbied for its existence, I cannot agree," West wrote. "I think from what I have heard, there is little substance to the program and we could regret ever getting it started in Oklahoma."

Bridges, in an interview last week, said he no longer is involved in state Department of Mental Health dealings with Narconon's proposed facility.

Bridges, who had served as legislative liaison for the Mental Health Department, was reassigned earlier this year by interim Commissioner Don Anderson and is now coordinator of special projects.

Mental Health administrators sent out a memo last week reminding employees to remain impartial concerning Narconon's proposed treatment center.

Barry said she "sometimes" still does consulting work for Narconon, which is now seeking certification from the state Department of Mental Health to open its 75-bed facility.

Staff writer Ed Godfrey contributed this report.

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