

Town terrorized for fighting church

AUG 4 1991

When Narconon comes to town, the Church of Scientology — and trouble — follows, residents of Newkirk, Okla. warned yesterday.

Newkirk civic leaders were threatened and harassed by the controversial church and its private investigators after they opposed a Narconon treatment centre set up on Indian territory near the small, rural town in 1989, Mayor Gary Bilger said.

"We had three investigators in our little town of 2,300 off and on for weeks," he said.

"My little boy was 11 years old at that time. They'd go up to him and hand him their card to give to his dad. They had contact with my kids on the street, they hung around my daughter's car at school," he said.

Ironically, Bilger and almost everyone else in town welcomed Narconon in the beginning — Bilger was especially pleased when the Association for Better Living and Education (ABLE) awarded \$200,000 to Narconon at a ceremony to celebrate the 33-centre organization's expansion.

Then, local newspaper publisher Bob Lobsinger discovered ABLE and Narconon shared the same address in Los Angeles.

"That was the first deception," Lobsinger said.

"They came out here to the country and put on a dog and pony show for all us country bumpkins."

He and other media reports claim Nar-

conon is actually a thinly-disguised Scientology indoctrination program which — like dozens of Scientology operations — was set up under a different name to sidestep the bad press the cult has received.

A Narconon spokesperson in Toronto said the group is considering setting up shop in Winnipeg — it is currently fundraising here.

Lobsinger warned Winnipeggers to investigate Narconon thoroughly if it moves here.

"Don't just take the word of the salesman — in this case, they don't just take your money. They take your life."

After Lobsinger published a damning two-page report on Narconon in his weekly Newkirk Herald Journal, the church placed ads in other Oklahoma newspapers accusing anyone opposed to Narconon of being involved in, and profiting from, the drug trade.

It sent investigators to dig up dirt on Bilger and Lobsinger, and to hassle other residents, Lobsinger said.

Recently, the Herald Journal's circulation list was stolen — and coincidentally all 1,000 subscribers on the list received pamphlets by mail a few weeks ago from the Church of Scientology, he said.

The local Church of Scientology couldn't be reached for comment.