

DIDN'T MISLEAD,

Nothing 'covert' involving city teens, says Scientology

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The director of public affairs for the Church of Scientology in Western Canada denied yesterday it misled about 60 Winnipeg teenagers, hired to raise funds for a drug rehabilitation program linked to the church.

"I just think it's very much a tempest in a teapot. This (project) employed a lot of kids," Robbie Hepburn, who flew in to Winnipeg from British Columbia, said.

"Yes, there's a connection, but it's not some kind of covert or bad connection."

Just because Narconon uses the teachings of Scientology founder L. Ron Hubbard "doesn't mean the church is even interested in what it's doing," she said.

The fundraising program is run by a Winnipeg company called Mr. Pepperette — a division of Wellington Food Service, 431 Thames Ave.

Brian Knowles, a partner in Wellington Food Service and a member of the Church of Scientology, said his company's involvement is strictly business and that he approached Narconon with the fundraising concept.

'Fundraising company'

"We're a fundraising company. We're listed in the yellow pages. We deal with schools, church groups. We operate out of Winnipeg and that's our business. And that's all there is to it," Knowles said.

"I don't believe there's a financial tie going up into the church."

The flyers provided by the company for employees to give to customers at the door don't mention the Church of Scientology and don't say how much of the money raised from the sale of T-shirts and pepperoni go toward the Toronto drug program, Knowles said.

"I think you're over-estimating the amount of money going out of the province."

"We're talking about 10 per cent of the net proceeds. It's not a great amount. It's not like all that money is going over to Narconon."

"The students — they're paid. They get about \$5 per unit. Then there's the ads that are placed for employment. Then there's the paycheques of the company employees."

The flyer states the name of the company and a phone number to call if customers have questions. It also gives the number of the Toronto Narconon centre — one of two in Canada.

Too much information

Knowles said the flyers don't include the Church of Scientology name because it might be too much information for employees to explain at the door.

"They get out there and some of them are a little nervous," he said.

He added he doesn't expect the program will last long.

"It would probably be, at the most, a six-month program. By no means did we ever expect to fund a Narconon (centre) here — by any stretch of the imagination."

Not being used

Hepburn said the Narconon program is not being used to recruit members to the Church of Scientology.

"I've been in Scientology for a number of years. I don't know that

No one told of link: ex-worker

A woman hired by a firm to help raise money for a drug rehabilitation program linked to the Church of Scientology, said yesterday employees were never told of the connection.

"They told us it had nothing to do with it," she said, asking to remain unnamed for fear of getting in trouble with the church.

"We thought with the money — and the help of other agencies and the government — eventually we'd have a reputable place in Winnipeg for people (to get drug rehabilitation)," she said.

"As students, we'd like to be able to make a difference because Winnipeg has a growing drug problem. That's why we're out there going door-to-door."

Their own hopes for helping

solve Canada's drug problem were buoyed by the good sales of their brightly colored, "Just Say No To Drugs" T-shirts, she said.

But they became concerned when several customers started questioning why they didn't have I.D., going door-to-door selling the T-shirts and pepperoni.

Company officials indicated it was just an oversight — to tell customers to call the telephone number on handouts if they have questions, she said.

However, further concern was raised when several employees learned about the connection to the Church of Scientology, she said, adding they then decided to quit because it was not a Christian organization.