

Earth, steel vaults keep Scientology papers for posterity

By MICHEL NOLAN
Special to The Sun

CRESTLINE — When the Church of Spiritual Technology needed a safe place to store its religious documents and materials, staff members looked high and low.

The church, which serves as archivist for the documents of the Church of Scientology, founded by the late L. Ron Hubbard, decided to build underground vaults at the 5,200-foot elevation in the San Bernardino Mountains.

The organization, which has a staff but no congregation, purchased 33 acres in the Arrowhead Highlands portion of Crestline.

The vaults are important to keep irreplaceable documents away from the damaging effects of smog, said Jane McNairn, spokeswoman for the Church of Spiritual Technology.

McNairn would answer no further questions about the purpose of the complex or about the documents.

The church also reportedly has bought land in New Mexico and Northern California to preserve and store Hubbard's writings and taped lectures.

At the Crestline property, two side-by-side underground storage vaults, elliptical and covered

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Church: Records stored underground

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with corrugated steel, have been built in the hillside.

The vaults, connected by metal corridors, are 23 feet wide by 104 feet long. The interior of the vaults, lined with insulated foam and squared-off concrete walls, enclose an area 17 feet wide.

The storage areas are climate-controlled and ventilated to preserve the documents, said Dick Pretzinger of MMP & Associates Inc., the Cedar Glen-based engineering company that developed the site plan.

The elliptical shape of the vaults was designed for strength, Pretzinger said. He estimated that they were buried about five feet below the surface.

"Uncovered, the vaults look like two submarines in dry dock," said plans examiner Paul Hamilton, who inspected the vaults for the county Department of Building and Safety.

Boxes of documents are received at an above-ground administration building, where they are catalogued for storage, said Pretzinger.

After the documents have been prepared, they are loaded into a van and transported about 75 feet to a cargo elevator in an enclosed loading dock above the subterranean vaults.

Documents then are lowered by elevator to the floor of the underground storage room and filed for safekeeping.

Pretzinger said he was told by staff personnel that in addition to Scientology material, the vaults contained documents from other religions.

At one point, a tunnel was planned between the vaults and the administration building, but the Crestline Lake Arrowhead Water Agency objected because the tunnel would have passed about three feet under its 18-inch pipe.

An elevator was built instead.

The church property, which extends east from Lake Gregory Drive between Highway 189 and North Road, includes an administration building, 10 residential structures, a dining hall, garage, TV satellite and microwave dishes, and a parking area for 96 vehicles.

Required parking normally would have been 172 parking spaces, but the site plan specifies that all buildings are for private use, with no visitors allowed.

Three of the new structures replace five residences built from 1898 to 1902. Four others from that period remain, as do two buildings dating from 1910.

A staff of 34 maintains the church complex and archives.

For security, a wrought-iron fence extends around the perimeter of the property. Next to the gated entrance is a guard shack.

One structure houses three generators capable of producing 35.5 kilovolt-amperes.

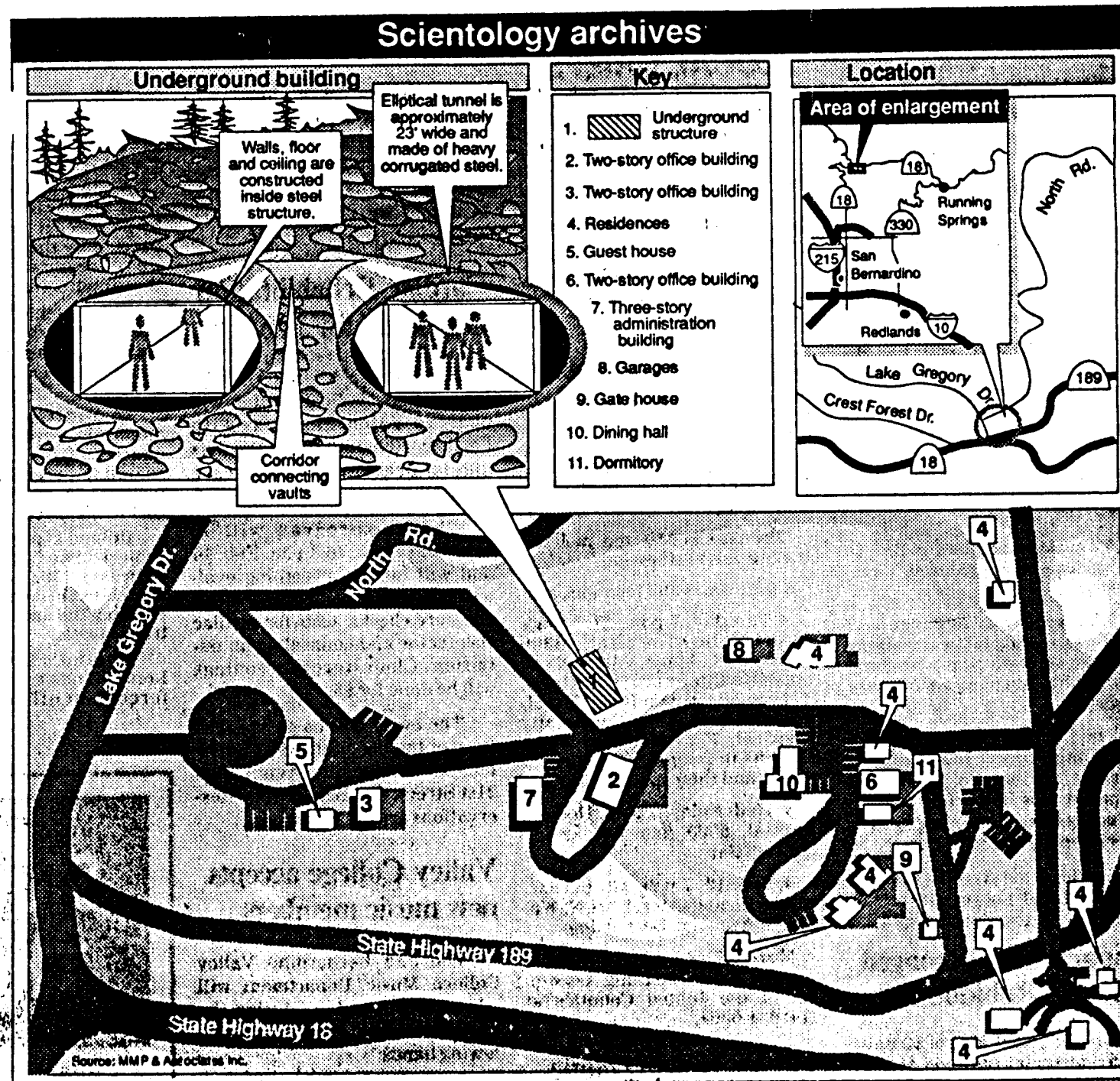
"These generators could sustain the property with or without help from the Edison Co.," said Tim Steenson, county building inspection supervisor.

"This church project differs very little from other church complex structures except for the fact that they chose to store documents underground," Steenson said.

Pretzinger said his firm will finish a paving project in the spring and then the entire project will be ready for final inspection by the county.

Until the property is reassessed after that inspection, the site's value stands at \$3,726,298, according to county records. The year's property taxes are \$48,319.

"There were 46 conditions of approval fixed to the property in June 1988. In the spring, building and safety will see if there have been complied with before they give final approval."



LINDA BRENNAN/The Sun