

PARTNERS 'INTO' CHURCH

By PAT ST. GERMAIN
Sun Staff Writer

Ex-employees claim pressure to join

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Top management in a Winnipeg company operating a fund-raising campaign for Narconon — a drug rehabilitation program with ties to the Church of Scientology — have been involved with the church for years, former employees allege.

Wellington Food Service partners Brian Knowles and Al Pringle Jr. have been cult members for at least three years, and have tried to convince company employees to join the cult, three men who worked for the company claim.

"They were all into it really heavy. They offered courses at the office for guys to take," said Aaron Thiessen, a salesman who left the company about two years ago.

The Church of Scientology — alleged to be a cult accused of criminal activities — encourages members to take a series of expensive courses designed to rid them of negative thoughts and feelings.

Another former salesman, Les Landry, said the partners "harassed you every minute" to join the church and take courses.

He said Knowles and Pringle tried to convince him to go to Narconon in Toronto for treatment for his alcoholism, even though he's a member of Alcoholics Anonymous, and had been sober for nine years at the time.

He was persuaded to pay \$600 for a book and course on "handling the ups and downs in life" and was lined up for more courses, he said.

Before Landry left the company "by mutual agreement," his bosses continually questioned where he went and who he talked to after hours, and tried to persuade him his girlfriend was bad news because she wasn't a church member, he said.

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Another former worker said he was fired "as a suppressive force" and a "potential trouble source," because he ridiculed Scientology courses the compa-

ny advocated for employees.

Potential employees were given personality tests and encouraged to take a communications course that involved standing still for extended periods of time, or staring at the counsellor for extended periods, he said.

day he is a member of the church.

However, Pringle's father, Al Sr., said Wednesday there's no connection between the church and the company his son operates.

Hiring students to sell pepperoni and T-shirts door-to-door for Narconon has

6 *If AA every guided people the way these people do, nobody would be sober.*

— Les Landry, former salesman at Wellington Food Service, claiming the owners continually pried into his personal life

Knowles and Pringle took Scientology courses in business management, and used Scientology founder L. Ron Hubbard's theories to run the company, he said.

Neither Knowles nor Pringle returned The Sun's phone calls yesterday.

Knowles told The Sun last week he knew of no connection between the church and Narconon, but admitted Tues-

nothing to do with the church, but was just "an experiment," he said.

"They had to find out how valid a mechanism this is for fund-raising."

The Church of Scientology has consistently denied the link with Narconon, although Narconon uses L. Ron Hubbard's techniques and buys its material from the church's publisher.