

MIGHTY MAPLE

Seaholm's
Gholston takes
her fastball
to Bowling
Green

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THE SUNDAY DAILY TRIBUNE

Music
Pine Knob
announces
summer
series lineup



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April 23, 1995

"Your Community Information Center"

Oakland County, Michigan \$1

Update

SUNNY



■ Sunday,
partly
sunny.
High in
the mid to
upper 50s.
Monday,
chance of

showers.

Weather map/Page 3A

PSSST ...

■ **MORE MUSIC:** The South Oakland Concert Band, under the direction of George D. Gillespie, has issued an invitation for all interested musicians to join its 31st season. Anyone who plays a band instrument is welcome. No audition is required. The band rehearses Monday evenings at Addams Jr. High School in Royal Oak. Information, William Ryan at 726-2611.

The church that kept on taking?



Linda Hostetler, with her husband, Dan, is battling the Church of Scientology.

Staff photo by Dick Hunt

■ **Woman says
Scientology church
drained her of time,
and about \$150,000.**

By **Brian Murphy**
Staff Writer

ROYAL OAK — At first glance, Linda Hostetler appears the vibrant, independent woman who answered a personal ad eight years ago, beckoning her to join the Church of Scientology.

But a closer look reveals a puzzled 29-year-old woman, emotionally scarred by years of what she termed "psychological torture," and financially ruined by a much-maligned yet resilient and powerful empire into

which she said she not only poured her soul, but also tens of thousands of dollars.

Today, Hostetler is leading a challenging crusade against one of the most dynamic religions in the world today. A Scientology spokeswoman said Hostetler got a lot out of the church and is now turning on it with unwarranted vengeance.

Hostetler said she wants what's left of her four-year association with the Church of Scientology of Michigan in Royal Oak. What's left she said is \$6,916.98 worth of nonrendered services. What's gone, she said, is a chunk of her youth, her sense of trust and about \$150,000.

However, the church contends it has Hostetler's refund. It says the Detroit woman is merely holding out as an excuse to rail the same church

for which she offered nothing but praise during her tenure as a member.

Last month, a Hostetler-led demonstration against an introductory Scientology lecture outside a Livonia hotel yielded little fanfare. Hostetler, her husband, Dan, her mother and a girlfriend picketed the parking lot, trumpeting her warnings against joining the church. An entire room of her modest northwest Detroit home is dedicated to the church. It's filled with indebted credit reports, bank records, church literature and a decade of magazine and newspaper articles exposing a dark side to Scientology, the self-proclaimed religion of spiritual enlightenment.

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Church

Continued from Page 1A

In painstaking chronology, Hostetler recounted her five-year odyssey through the church, most of which she spent at the downtown Royal Oak center on Fourth at Williams.

"I was young and impressionable, and I thought I could trust these people," said Hostetler. "I had a long relationship with a trusting friend, and that friend was L. Ron Hubbard and the Church of Scientology — my church — and they betrayed me."

Hubbard was a science-fiction writer who authored the mother of all self-help books, *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*, in 1950. Five years later, he founded the Church of Scientology.

It professes to clear people of unhappiness through countless stages of expensive counseling (about \$12,500 per 12 ½-hour block) called auditing and hours of studying the church's immense doctrine.

Hubbard died in 1986, but his legacy flourishes.

Scientology boasts 700 centers in 65 countries. It's headquartered in Los Angeles. There are two centers in Michigan, one in Royal Oak, the other in Ann Arbor. Scientology spokeswoman Wendy Bellinger said there are about 5,000 Scientology members in Michigan.

Spare her pity

Hostetler said she doesn't want pity, and she shuns the likely scorn of mainstream adults who might roll their eyes at the thought of a grown woman spending her life savings and then some to find herself.

She stated similar protests are planned and said suing the church for her refund might be on the horizon.

"It's not easy to stand up and say, 'Look, I've been conned out of \$150,000. It does take a gut,'" Hostetler said.

Hostetler was single and living in Atlanta in 1987 when she took the church's free personality test. The Detroit native said she was immediately intrigued by the church's promotional literature, which professed the spiritual benefits of Dianetics and boasted celebrity members such as John Travolta and Kirstie Alley.

"It was very impressive. I thought, 'if this is really going to save me spiritually, I want more of this,'" explained Hostetler.

More cost more, though. Flowing up the bridge to enlightenment, from the personality test to the most advanced level, costs the average person about \$200,000-\$400,000 and could take years. According to Scientology doctrine, completion of several levels of study and counseling, auditing, clears adherents of all negative spiritual beings.



Photo by Melissa Wawzysko

The Church of Scientology Building at Fourth and Williams in Royal Oak.

Upward bound

Within a year, Hostetler — who said she was making \$1,000 a week as a nightclub dancer — estimated she had charged about \$50,000 worth of auditing to her credit cards.

Still, Hostetler returned to Detroit in 1989 and continued her auditing.

"I figured if I was ever going to make it up the bridge, I was going to do it here," she said.

Hostetler enrolled in the "Key to Life" course. There, Hostetler said, she endured daily study and auditing sessions that lasted up to 11 hours, five days a week.

During the next three years, Hostetler said she crawled up the 34-rung ladder of enlightenment, continually shelling out thousands of dollars in the process.

"I thought I could trust these people. I had a lot of cash, and I thought this was the right thing to do," said Hostetler. "What you have over there is this big monster. It's a cult, and it's got all these nasty things in it."

"But you really can't see it because all you see is this beautiful facade in front of you with smiling faces and well-dressed people telling you and showing you how Dianetics can improve your life. It was all done for money."

Debt deepens

Running out of economic options, Hostetler said she borrowed money from her mother, whom she said disdained the church "because of what it was doing to her daughter."

"I brought her into the church, and she rejected it," said Hostetler. "Because of that, I was not allowed to see her a lot because she was a so-called 'suppressive person.' It tore us apart."

Hostetler said she was also constantly berated because of her job as a dancer but was never delivered an ultimatum because of the continuing cash flow.

"They were always trying to make me feel guilty. They said it wasn't something that they condoned and that I needed to fix myself up," Hostetler said. "But it was good money, and that was the only way I could afford all the auditing. And they knew that."

By the summer of 1993, Hostetler was faced with a \$150,000 credit debt, frustrated at the seemingly endless climb up the ladder and concerned about her marriage.

"What I saw was a person in total confusion," said her husband, Dan, a former Scientologist whom she married in 1990. Dan Hostetler, 47, left the church after he said it "became obvious they were just eager to rush you through the door to get your money."

He said he convinced his wife she was being conned.

"I saw what happened to my wife," he said. "She had no control of herself. She could not make a decision about anything. They had her totally brainwashed."

Said Linda Hostetler, "At one time I didn't know who was president. I didn't really care because L. Ron Hubbard was my God."

Linda Hostetler left the church in July 1993 and demanded a refund on about \$14,000 of auditing she said she hadn't received. To date, she said she's received only about \$7,600.

By disputing her credit charges,

Hostetler said she was able to wrest about \$30,000 back from her creditors. She said she is struggling to get herself on stable financial footing.

She said the emotional wounds may take longer to heal.

"I have been cheated of five years of my life — my youth — that I will never have again," stated Hostetler. "I feel some emptiness. I'd hate to admit that they've had that sort of effect on me, but I can't say there isn't any bitterness there."

An ax to grind?

Bellinger portrayed Hostetler as an embittered apostate whose conscience prevented her from advancing in the church, and therefore she left with an ax to grind.

"The ironic part is that we have her refund waiting for her, and she has refused to accept it," said Bellinger. "She doesn't want to accept it, so she has an excuse to say bad things."

"The church is always looking for people to raise their standards," Bellinger added. "When she reached a point where she couldn't improve anymore, she said, 'OK, I don't want to do this anymore.'"

"You have kind of a vendetta going on, but why she would feel that way?" she added. "It could only be her conscience. It's kind of sad, really."

Bellinger denied that the church subjected her to "psychological torture."

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