

## Ex-Scientologists describe illegal activities

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CLEARWATER — Why, Robert Dardano was asked, had he done it — why had he participated with other Scientologists in burglaries and theft of documents and smear campaigns against the church's perceived enemies?

Because he was convinced, the slender, soft-spoken Dardano told Clearwater city commissioners, "that Scientology was going to save the planet and free the world."

"That we were right and everyone else was wrong."

Dardano, a 31-year-old Boston resident, was one of eight witnesses to testify Saturday during commission hearings into activities of the Clearwater-based church.

Dardano and two other ex-Scientologists, Scott Mayer and Janie Peterson, described their knowledge of or involvement in numerous illicit activities designed to harass or silence church critics.

Ex-Scientologist LaVenda Van Schaick and author Paulette Cooper testified that they were the objects of such



*'We considered anyone and everyone an enemy of the church.'*

— Robert Dardano,  
 ex-Scientologist

attacks.

INDEED, IT WAS Ms. Cooper, Dardano said, whose files he helped steal from a Massachusetts doctor's

office one Saturday morning.

Dardano, Mayer and Ms. Peterson all testified that they had acted according to policies applied at Scientology organizations around the world.

Such policies, concealed from church members who buy Scientology services in Clearwater, belie the church's claim to have charitable purposes, according to Boston lawyer Michael J. Flynn, the city's \$80,000 consultant for the Scientology hearings.

"That's the nature of what the hearing is all about — deception," said Flynn.

Flynn says commissioners can curb that "deception" by passing ordinances governing charitable solicitation and consumer protection.

On Saturday, he wrapped up four days of presenting witnesses and documents to the commission. The Scientologists have been offered four days to rebut Flynn's evidence, beginning Monday, but have not yet announced whether they will do so.

Scientology spokesman Hugh Wilhere continued on Saturday his policy of not commenting on the testimony. The church's lawyer, Paul B. Johnson of Tampa, could not be reached, but he has previously ridiculed the hearings as a "farce" and a "witch hunt."

DARDANO TOLD commissioners he was a Scientologist from 1971 to 1976. Like other Scientologists, he said, he was "brainwashed" and became "totally committed" to the church.

In 1973, Dardano said, he accepted assignment to the Boston church's "Guardian's Office" — a wing of the church whose function was to protect Scientology from criticism.

Among non-Scientologists, "We considered anyone and everyone an enemy of the church," Dardano said.

His job was to gather information, and the church trained him for it, Dardano said. It involved both "overt

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data collection," practiced in such places as the public library, and "covert data collection."

The latter called for less savory practices, such as surveillance of newspaper reporters and planting agents in the offices of government agencies and a large Boston law firm, he said.

The job also involved burglary, Dardano testified.

He and his coworkers participated in "Operation Freakout," a plan conceived in 1976 to have Ms. Cooper, author of a book entitled *The Scandal of Scientology*, placed in jail or a mental institution.

As part of the plan, Dardano and his colleagues drove a van to a Massachusetts doctor's office, burglarized it, and walked out with Ms. Cooper's file, he said.

While Dardano worked only in the Boston area, Mayer told commissioners that he also was familiar with illicit Scientology activities around the world.

A bearded, 38-year-old Los Angeles resident, Mayer said he spent seven years as a "senior executive" and "trouble-shooter" for the church.

**HE DESCRIBED** such activities as smuggling cash out of the country in disguised packages, sending a Scientologist wanted for breaking and entering to Canada under the guise of a tourist trip and disseminating intimate information about ex-Scientologists that had been obtained in supposedly confidential church counseling.

Though some of it did not occur in Clearwater, "Those activities were monitored by telex . . . in your city," Mayer said.

One of the reasons Flynn has cited for cracking down on the church is that Clearwater is a "central communications link" for criminal activities around the world.

Thus Flynn told commissioners Saturday that Mayer's testimony "is extremely important with regard to the proposed ordinances."

Not only has Mayer participated in unsavory church activities, he also believes he has been a victim of them since leaving the church in 1977, he said. On Christmas Day 1978, his car was blown up outside a building whose location he had purposely identified to church officials, he said.

One of his reasons for testifying is that "I would like to see the tables turned for a change," he said.

Testifying earlier, Ms. Peterson said that when she worked for the church in Las Vegas between 1975 and 1980, she was aware of the unscrupulous use of confidentially obtained information against several ex-Scientologists. Among them were Ernest and Dell Hartwell, who testified Friday.

Ms. Peterson, 34, and other witnesses have testified that Scientologists would not buy counseling services if they knew the information might be used against them.

**THE CHURCH'S** policy of using counseling information against critics constitutes a fraudulent practice that commissioners should regulate, Flynn has said.

Ms. Van Schaick, 32, testified that counseling information was used in an attempt to blackmail her after she quit the church in 1979. She has sued the church in federal court in Boston with Flynn as her attorney.

(Of witnesses who have testified at the hearings, six are current or former law clients of Flynn: Ms. Van Schaick, Ms. Peterson, Ms. Cooper, the Hartwells and Edward Walters, according to church spokesman Wilhere.)

Ms. Van Schaick said there have been other church attempts to harass her, including the bugging of her home and telephone and an attempt to split her from her husband by telling her that he had had affairs with other women. This, Ms. Peterson testified, was part of a Scientology scheme known as "Operation Shake and Bake."

While a Scientologist Ms. Van Schaick spent the summer of 1977 at the church's Clearwater headquarters. She said she saw filthy and overcrowded conditions, mistreatment of infants and inoculations given for what she believes was a "hepatitis epidemic."

Ms. Cooper, a New York free-lance writer, told commissioners she has spent \$50,000 in legal fees to respond to church harassment since her expose of Scientology was published in 1971.

**CHURCH AGENTS** succeeded in getting her indicted on phony bomb threat charges, and three years later launched "Operation Freakout" against her. The church currently has 18 lawsuits against her — the latest filed just last week, she said.

Though church officials say they have stopped attempting dirty tricks against critics, "I do not believe they have changed," Ms. Cooper said. "That is one of the main reasons I have come here."

After listening to her testimony and that of Flynn's other witnesses, City Manager Tony Shoemaker agrees.

"Well, I think there's a lot of things wrong" with Scientology, Shoemaker said after the hearings adjourned Saturday evening. "That's really obvious."