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Splinter group

Ex-Scientologist plans to offer classes for former sect members



DAVID FINDLAY
... ex-Scientologist.

By DAVID DAHL
Clearwater Times Staff Writer

CLEARWATER — A former Scientologist says he is about to form a group in north Pinellas County that will offer Scientology-related classes, but will not be affiliated with the controversial sect.

David Findlay, who recently moved to North Pinellas, said he plans to begin offering the classes somewhere in Clearwater's Countryside area in the next two or three months.

Like other splinter Scientology groups around the country, Findlay said he will largely draw on people who have left the Church of Scientology, but still believe its teachings can motivate participants and help them gain "spiritual freedom."

IN AUGUST and September, Findlay placed legal advertisements in four issues of the

Pinellas County Review announcing his intentions to form an organization called the Independent Information Center. The function of the Information Center will be to contact disenchanted Scientologists Findlay hopes eventually will take his classes.

Findlay said the classes will be taught by himself and three or four other former Scientologists, who he said have agreed to help with the project. Findlay said he has yet to name the organization that will offer classes — but he said it won't be "Scientology."

"I think the word itself has become so blackened there's no advantage," Findlay said.

He said he recently mailed letters to 300 current or former Scientologists in Pinellas to tell them of his organization, and so far has received about 15 responses. He estimated there could be as many as 500 to 600 people in the area who have

left or want to leave the sect but still believe in its teachings.

Findlay's organization would be the first Scientology "splinter" group in the Pinellas area, though similar groups have started in California, Arizona and Miami.

The splinter groups teach Scientology-related technology. But, their operators say, their courses cost about one-fifth the price charged by the Church of Scientology itself.

"IF PEOPLE want to pay sensible prices, then I will be offering alternative services," Findlay said.

The Church of Scientology has opposed some of the splinter groups, saying they use trademarked "technology" and names belonging to the sect.

Richard Haworth, spokesman for the Clearwater office of the Church of Scientology, said

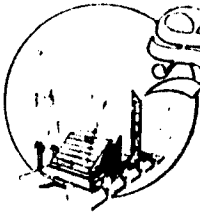
former Scientologists such as Findlay are attempting to "line their pockets" with money by teaching courses belonging to the sect.

Haworth, who normally handles all media relations for the local sect, arranged an interview with Findlay's former brother-in-law in an attempt to discredit Findlay. Henrik Palmquist, 24, said in the interview that Findlay left behind \$25,000 in debts when he left Sweden and is a "good talker." Findlay refused to respond.

In an earlier interview, Findlay, a 45-year-old Englishman, said he has been affiliated with the Church of Scientology for 20 years in Sweden and Denmark. He said he has produced slide presentations promoting the Church of Scientology.

Findlay said he traveled in the late 1960s and early 1970s with Scientology founder L. Ron

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Hubbard aboard a yacht Hubbard used as his headquarters. Confirming this were Bill Franks, a former top-ranking member of the church, and Palmquist, Findlay's former brother-in-law.

Findlay quit the sect about 18 months ago, he said, joining others who are not happy with reports that some Scientologists have broken the law or mismanaged the church finances.

HE ALSO said he "didn't agree" with price increases charged by the Church of Scientology for services and classes. By the early 1980s, Findlay estimated he was spending more than \$15,000 a year to take the Scientology courses.

"Even since that time, prices have just skyrocketed," Findlay said recently.

In September, Findlay began operating the Independent Information Center out of his home in North Pinellas.

The organization's letters sent to hoped-for recruits include quotes from Shakespeare — "truth will come to light" — as well as from Scientology founder Hubbard — "The only way you can control people is to lie to them."

The quote from Hubbard is juxtaposed in one of the letters with an article suggesting someone now running the sect "forged" Hubbard's signature on certain documents in 1982. The documents assigned some important Scientology trademarks belonging to Hubbard to a Scientology affiliate. The sect founder himself hasn't been seen in public in several years.

In another letter, which Findlay gave to a reporter, Findlay tells his hoped-for recruits that he has investigated the sect and found "that all is not well within the Church (of Scientology) and that the only workable way of correcting (it) is from the outside, as an independent, and not by operating from within."

IN THE next few months, Findlay said he and three or four other former Scientologists plan to begin offering courses. He plans to use in his courses the E-meter — a lie detector-like device. Scientologists say helps locate a person's shortcomings — along with other similar teachings.

Findlay said his group will attempt to remain noncontroversial.

"The only point of similarity is the actual use of some of the technology," Findlay said.

He said he has no immediate plans to buy property in the area for the organization and will rent a suite probably in the Countryside area. He likes that area for its "younger, progressive element," he said.

As for the organization's tax status — which has caused problems for the Church of Scientology — Findlay said he plans to consult with an attorney and discuss whether his group could qualify for religious exemptions.

However, Findlay said he does expect some opposition from the Church of Scientology.

The sect boasts a worldwide membership of 6-million. It came to Clearwater in 1975 posing as an entirely different church and has since purchased 10 properties in upper Pinellas.

IN 1979, the wife of sect founder L. Ron Hubbard and eight others were convicted of conspiring to block an IRS investigation of the sect. And, earlier this year, the IRS ruled that the sect is not entitled to an exemption granted churches.

The controversies have prompted many members to leave the church in recent years, some Scientology opponents say. Many of those who left still believe in the teachings espoused by the sect and have joined splinter groups.

In California, the sect itself and the splinter groups have a hostile relationship, said David Mayo, who operates a Scientology splinter group in Santa Barbara, Calif.

Mayo's organization is called the Advanced Abilities Center and has affiliates in Palo Alto, Phoenix and Miami, Mayo said.

Mayo and Findlay said Findlay has taken courses at the Advanced Abilities Center in Santa Barbara. However, Findlay said he doesn't plan to affiliate himself with Mayo's groups at this time.

According to Mayo, his group still offers some Scientology-related courses but attempts to stay away from controversies the sect has gotten itself into.

"We feel the technology has a lot of good to it," Mayo said in a telephone interview.