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Sect president denies wrongdoing in probe

By JEFF MANGUM
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Recent reports about the Church of Scientology hiring de-

pose as businessmen to elicit views about the sect from Clearwater civic leaders are "much ado about nothing," sect President Heber Jentzsch said Wednesday.

"The issues all will come out in court," the 48-year-old Jentzsch told reporters during an "open house" at the sect-owned Fort Harrison Hotel in downtown Clearwater.

Jentzsch would not discuss specifics, but hinted the Scientology inquiry was tied into concerns about real estate speculation downtown and its potential effect on the sect.

The sect filed papers in U.S. District Court in Tampa Jan. 31 acknowledging an investigation was undertaken by detectives hired by the sect.

That investigation entailed a harbor cruise with a bank president, an attorney and a local Realtor to discuss downtown development. The Church of Scientology and the city's then-upcoming hearings on the sect also were discussed.

The court filing came about a week after Boston attorney and chief sect nemesis Michael Flynn alleged a Scientology plot to embarrass U.S. District Judge Ben Krentzman.

Jentzsch dismissed newspaper reports about a plot against Krentzman as "third-hand hearsay" engineered by Flynn to "try a case in the newspapers."

The sect leader compared Flynn and other Scientology critics to Japanese soldiers on remote Pacific islands who refused to be-



HEBER JENTZSCH

lieve World War II had ended, spending their time "crawling around and eating cockroaches."

"The war is over," Jentzsch declared. "And we've won the war over religious freedom."

Flynn could not be reached for comment.

A resident of Los Angeles, Jentzsch said he will be in Clearwater until Friday to spread the word about a ruling in October by the Australian Supreme Court recognizing Scientology as a religion.

"Oh heavens, no," Jentzsch responded when asked if his "open house" and appearance on a radio call-in show in Tampa were prompted by the recent spate of articles about the sect. "I'm going to address our public and our staff."

Complete with stories about life (Please see * SECT, next page)

* Sect

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as a farm boy in Utah, Jentzsch said he joined the sect in 1967 after a career as a singer and actor. His resume lists acting credits in television shows such as "Mod Squad" and "Combat."

Originally from a Mormon family, Jentzsch said his interest in Scientology began after reading founder L. Ron Hubbard's 1950s bestseller, "Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health."

As president of Church of Scientology International, Jentzsch said, the sect's governing board pays him \$24 a week—with occasional bonuses bringing his in-

come to \$40.

Hubbard's whereabouts have been the source of speculation since 1979. His estranged son failed last year to convince a California judge that the 72-year-old Hubbard is dead or mentally impaired and shielded by the sect.

"Mr. Hubbard doesn't have to come and appear," Jentzsch said, acknowledging he has not seen Hubbard in recent years. "You gotta understand that the man, he's a writer. ... We the people set up the church."

Handwriting analyses submitted during the California trial confirmed that Hubbard is alive and

well, Jentzsch said.

Like another Church of Scientology member who held an "open house" last month, Jentzsch said the paid courses and counseling offered by the sect are worth the financial price.

"I paid that kind of money when I was going to college and I didn't get the same results," Jentzsch said.

Texas millionaire and sect member William "Willie B." Wilson held a similar conference Jan. 20 to debunk claims that he was held against his will as he tried to leave the Fort Harrison in a cab Jan. 2.