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Selling good will, or Dianetics?

Major Games sponsor outrages some by its link to Scientology

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Times staff reporters

There is Pepsi-Cola, there is Gillette, there is Eastman Kodak and Fruit Of The Loom. And then there is Dianetics.

Wherever there has been Goodwill Games, there has been Dianetics. As one of 12 worldwide sponsors of the international athletic competition, Dianetics has splashed across television screens, sides of buses, huge banners, even behind the goal of the Tri-Cities hockey rink. And then there was that huge Dianetics hospitality tent in the University District earlier this week.

Dianetics' high-profile presence — the result of a \$4 million deal between Bridge Publications Inc. and Turner Broadcasting System — baffles some and outrages others.

Pepsi is a drink, Gillette is a razor, but what is Dianetics?

"Dianetics" is the title of a book, written in 1950 by the late L. Ron Hubbard, and published in the U.S. by Bridge Publications. "Dianetics" is being heavily promoted by Bridge during the Games. The corporate name seldom appears in connection with the promotions.

Dianetics is also "a mental science," according to Jobee Knight, print-media director for Bridge Publications.

Critics say the book is a recruitment tool for a religious organization, the Church of Scientology, which they contend manipulates and intimidates people, breaking up families along the way.

"A lot of us got into Scientology because of the book," says

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Margery Wakefield, a former member from Clearwater, Fla., who sued the church for damages she says she suffered during her 12-year involvement in Scientology. She collected \$200,000 in an out-of-court settlement.

"The Dianetics book is the main technique they have for getting you through the front door," says Wakefield, who organized a letter-writing campaign in protest of Bridge Publications' sponsorship of the Goodwill Games.

"People don't know what Bridge Publications represents," says Gary Harmon of Seattle, who says the Church of Scientology nearly ruined his son's life. "They don't know what Dianetics is all about."

Bridge officials say the dispute is not their problem; they simply want to sell their major product, the book, which happens to be used by the Church of Scientology.

Dianetics is the "forerunner of Scientology and is today in extensive use by Scientology churches and organizations all over the world," according to a footnote in a current edition of the book.

Bridge spokeswoman Sharyn Runyan responds: "What's the story? That Scientology uses Hubbard's material? What's news about that?"

Bridge works "very closely" with the Church of Scientology, she says. "They're one of our largest distributors. The Church of Scientology sells books. So does Waldenbooks."

Despite the close relationship, Knight says individuals with reservations about the church have no reason to object to Bridge's sponsorship of the Games.

"The church is a completely separate entity. It is not involved in the sponsorship of the Goodwill Games," she says.

In any case, it seems that the Church of Scientology plans to benefit from Dianetics' role in the Goodwill Games.

A recent edition of International Scientology News, a glossy newsletter distributed to church members, notes: "In order to create an enormous international impact, Dianetics has become a major sponsor of the upcoming Goodwill Games . . ."

Using jargon familiar to Scientologists, the memo continues:

"All these dissemination actions are being done with the sole purpose of getting more and more people introduced to LRH's TECH (L. Ron Hubbard's spiritual techniques) so they will go into orgs (church groups) and rapidly move up 'The Bridge' (a spiritual path) to Total Freedom (the spiritual goal)."

Today, Scientology claims to have 700 churches around the world, with 6 million members.

The church's rapid expansion, along with its involvement in social issues, has made it a ready target for critics, says Ann Ruble, corporate director for the church in Washington.

Since its founding by Hubbard in 1955, the church has been embroiled in controversy. In recent years, numerous lawsuits have

been brought by former members who complained they were intimidated and brainwashed. Although many cases have resulted in out-of-court settlements, church officials have denied any wrongdoing.

Most of the lawsuits, Ruble says, were motivated by greed.

"Somebody goes into a religious organization and all of a sudden they discover one day 11 years later they were 'brainwashed?' What they discover is that they want \$100 million," she says.

Deprogrammers, who kidnap church members, also play a part, Ruble contends. "They get people like that pushing them to sue; that's the real story."

Detractors object to Scientology in general, and, during the Games, have protested Bridge's sponsorship specifically. They say Bridge is not being honest about its connection to the Church of Scientology.

"I think they are being deceptive," says Harmon. "If they don't outright deny their connection to the Church of Scientology, they downplay it to the point where nobody would have a clue."

"If they simply said, 'We are the Church of Scientology and we are going to mess with your mind,' then I wouldn't be so upset. At least people could then make an informed choice."

Karyn Kuever of Kirkland, who was a member of the church for 16 years, says, "They are not promoting good will. They are promoting Dianetics, a practice that can break up families and destroy marriages."

Mike Mobley, Turner Broadcasting System spokesman in Atlanta, says TBS considered the complaints but decided to retain Bridge as a sponsor.

"Bridge Publications is a regular TBS advertiser. Given that, we saw nothing suspect in their interest in becoming a Goodwill Games sponsor," Mobley says. "Basically, it was a business decision."

For Bridge it was also a business decision, says company spokeswoman Runyan. "I don't think there is anything deceiving about this. We're a for-profit corporation. We're a company to sell books."

And that is what Bridge is doing in Seattle, according to Runyan.

After major booksellers in Seattle were wined and dined at the Games' opening ceremonies, Dianetics T-shirts appeared on the chests of booksellers. Last week, "Dianetics" moved up several notches on the B Dalton's and Waldenbooks' best-seller lists, says Runyan.

"We've done very well in Seattle," she says.

But the market in Seattle may be nothing compared with the potential market for "Dianetics" in the Soviet Union.

With a Russian translation and a Soviet distributorship in the works, Runyan expects staggering sales.

"It's an exciting market," she says. Right now, she says, the No. 1 seller in the Soviet Union is Dale Carnegie's "How to Win Friends and Influence People."

"These guys are looking for answers. That's why 'Dianetics' is going to go over there. It's really exciting."