

ANGRY TEENS PICKET SUN

By PAT ST. GERMAIN
Sun Staff Writer

About 30 teenagers hired to raise funds for Narconon — a drug rehabilitation program linked to the Church of Scientology — picketed The Sun's offices yesterday to protest news reports on Narconon and the church last week.

Several teenagers — accompanied by an adult spokesman bearing press kits — complained a recent Sun story linking Narconon to the alleged cult left the perception the teen salespeople are linked to the cult as well.

"All we were trying to do was get some summer employment," one 18-year-old protester said of the teens' jobs selling pepperoni and T-shirts door-to-door to raise funds for Narconon.

Links to Scientology cut into fundraising efforts for Narconon

"It's made it a lot harder on the sales reps."

Sun stories pointed to the connection between Narconon and the Church of Scientology — alleged by U.S. experts to be a dangerous cult involved in criminal activity which uses the Narconon program to recruit members.

Paul Wattman of Mr. Pepperette, the division of Wellington Food Service running the fund-raising program, denied he organized the protest, and claimed the company is raising money for Narconon because the drug program has an impressive track record.

However, medical professionals say Narconon's claims it has a 75 to 95-percent success rate are unsubstantiated, and its methods are questionable at best.

A church spokesperson, who flew to Winnipeg from British Columbia to handle publicity after the stories appeared, denied the church had anything to do with yesterday's protest.

Robbie Hepburn also denied the church is affiliated with Narconon, although both follow the teachings of church-founder L. Ron Hubbard, and the church supports and recommends Narconon for drug treatment.

The teens — some who said they were hired by Mr. Pepperette just this week — said the publicity is turning off potential customers and putting their summer jobs in jeopardy.

"We didn't do nothing wrong. It's hard enough to get a job, why take ours away?" said a 17-year-old youth who has worked

for the company for three weeks.

A 13-year-old girl said the youths — some wearing T-shirts emblazoned with the slogan Say No to Drugs — believed they were helping in the fight against drug abuse.

However, the teens said they hadn't heard of any link between the church and Narconon until they saw The Sun's stories.

And that was the main point of the story, said senior editor John Bertrand — letting the kids, and the public know who they're dealing with.

"It is about truth, and making sure the public is aware of all the details of something they've been asked to get involved in."

The Sun is not trying to prevent anyone from fund-raising or campaigning against drug abuse, he said, adding it's "fine and fair" if people still want to contribute to Narconon.

A Wellington Food Service manager, Brian Knowles, who is a member of the church, said his company is involved only in fund-raising for Narconon, which gets 10 per cent of the profits from sales.

Harassment shouldn't quiet media, say cult experts

The Church of Scientology has a long and undistinguished history of harassing its detractors — but that shouldn't stop the media or anyone else from speaking out against it, cult experts say.

The church commonly threatens lawsuits, tries to have detractors arrested, and harasses sources and individual reporters, said Cynthia Kissler of the Cult Awareness Network in Chicago.

And recent Sun stories linking the church — alleged by experts to be a dangerous, mind-control cult — to Narconon, a drug rehabilitation program, will likely be no exception, she said.

"I think they thought they were going to have a free run there in Winnipeg. They will try to bombard you and the media

with propaganda," she said.

Bob Lobsinger, publisher and editor of the Herald Journal in Newkirk, Okla., claimed he was threatened with lawsuits, harassed by private investigators, and robbed after he reported on the church's connection to Narconon two years ago.

The church even took out advertisements in other Oklahoma newspapers suggesting anyone opposed to Narconon was in favor of drug abuse, he said.

"Let 'em holler. They holler all the time," he said.

Toronto Sun reporter Bill Dunphy said after he wrote a feature story on Scientology last summer, the church tried to have him arrested and charged under the Ontario Private Investigators Act.

After a police investigation found there was no basis for any charges, the church tried to gain access to investigation reports under the Freedom of Information Act.

Dunphy opposed the move — which would reveal his sources and methods to the church — but he said he's sure the church will try again.

This summer, the church tried to have him found in contempt of court after he wrote a brief, legally permissible, story on an upcoming court case involving the church, he said.

Reporters at the Los Angeles Times who wrote a series on the church last year became the subjects of a \$1-million publicity campaign — they found their names plastered on billboards, along with quotes

taken out of text from their stories.

And a Time magazine cover story printed this May has garnered an 80-page booklet and a 27-page magazine slamming Time, its reporters, and its sources.

UCLA professor of psychiatry Dr. Louis West, who's studied — and criticized — the church for decades, said anyone who denounces the church can expect to be denounced and harassed.

"I've been harassed for years by them. It's not pleasant, but somebody has to (speak out)," he said.

"They have lots of money, and that means they have plenty of lawyers all over the place. Their No. 1 priority these days is respectability. They're going to make it as difficult for their critics as they can."