

FIRM DROPS NARCONON

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Teens want to keep jobs despite Scientology link

By PAT ST. GERMAIN
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A Winnipeg company is winding down a fund-raising campaign for Narconon — a drug rehabilitation program affiliated with the Church of Scientology — after The Sun exposed Narconon's connection to the cult last week.

But about 35 teenagers selling pepperoni and T-shirts for Mr. Peppercorn, a division of Wellington Food Service formed July 1, will work only until the end of the summer — and are continuing at their own request, manager Al Pringle said yesterday.

"They want to stick with it. They've got more guts than I do," he said, adding he hopes media attention will now turn away from the cult and the company.

The firm wasn't looking for trouble, but just wanted to give kids summer work and support a good cause, he said.

"It was just an accident on our part to not foresee what could happen."

And it's doubtful Narconon will receive much, if any, money from the campaign, he said, although teen salespeople have been using promotional material portraying the sales as anti-drug fundraising.

"We're probably not going to make enough money to give them (Narconon) anything. We'll see what happens. If there's anything to donate, we'll donate."

Pringle and his partner, Brian Knowles, are members of the church — al-

tivities — but Pringle denied claims by former employees he and Knowles tried to recruit them into the church.

He said the company offered only one church-related communications course several months ago. Former employees claim the company has pushed Scientology courses since 1989.

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— Al Pringle, manager, Wellington Food Service

Narconon is alleged to be a front for recruiting cult members. Medical experts say the program is potentially dangerous and its claims of a 75 to 95-per-cent success rate are unsubstantiated.

There is no Narconon centre in Winnipeg — it has centres in Toronto and Vancouver, and claims to have several centres in the U.S. and abroad.

The cult denounces traditional mental health programs.

But it promotes a seemingly endless series of courses designed to rid people of negative feelings brought on by such things as pre-natal traumas, the trauma of being born, the onset of menstruation, and so on, according to church founder L. Ron Hubbard's books.

U.S. experts say it's church policy to investigate critics to try to find

File photos



Student employees of Mr. Peppercorn staged a protest outside Sun offices last week.

sources and reporters, and to threaten litigation.

A Church of Scientology public affairs director flew in from British Columbia last Monday to combat negative publicity, and was apparently still working here Friday.

Robbie Hepburn denied Narconon is linked to the church, although it uses church materials and trademarks, and is named in church literature as its drug program.

Pringle said it's unfortunate the church receives bad publicity, but said "there might be some merit" in charges it harasses its critics.

He knew the church supported Narconon, but didn't know of any link with the church, and doesn't "really know entirely what Narconon does," he said.

The company may change its pam-



(ACTION LINES MISSING)