

# Former member of sect is suing

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7/19/91

CLEARWATER — The Church of Scientology is facing another lawsuit in the midst of an expensive nationwide campaign to bolster its image.

The sect, which maintains its spiritual headquarters in Clearwater, has spent millions of dollars in recent weeks for advertising in the newspaper USA Today.

In the lawsuit, a former sect member claims the church is a fraud; owes him money for counseling services he never used; and has cut him off from his two daughters, who still follow Scientology.

Similar allegations have prompted the church to spend the first part of its advertising campaign refuting a highly critical article in Time magazine. Lately, the full-page color advertisements have offered a bit of the teachings of L. Ron Hubbard, the founder of the church.

"It's a lot of basic Scientology," church spokesman Richard Haworth said.

The church will not release the amount spent so far on the advertisements.

Kenneth Wasserman, a Los Angeles lawyer, claims in his lawsuit the church has prevented him from visiting or talking with two daughters who still follow Scientology.

Wasserman further alleges that the church owes him \$15,000 for counseling sessions in which he never participated.

He filed the lawsuit in Pinellas-Pasco Circuit Court in Clearwater and is seeking \$5 million.

Haworth denied the allegations the church has prevented Wasserman's daughters from contacting him.

"Mr. Wasserman has no intention of trying to convince a court of law of the truthfulness of any of his outrageous allegations," Haworth

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said. "As an attorney, Mr. Wasserman should know better."

Wasserman spent 15 years in the church before leaving in 1985. In the lawsuit, he called the church a fraud, claiming the teachings of Hubbard are deceptive and the church's financial practices are corrupt.

Since he told his two daughters, ages 14 and 19, he had left Scientology, the church has prevented them from visiting with him for more than an hour, the lawsuit claims. Wasserman alleges he has not seen his daughters since February. Wasserman is divorced from their mother.

Scientology is based mostly on the writings of Hubbard, a science fiction writer and author of "Diane-

tics: The Modern Science of Mental Health." Hubbard died in 1986.

Practitioners believe negative experiences hinder their personal development on Earth. These experiences, they say, can be overcome through counseling sessions that, when spread out over years, can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Critics — most recently in the Time piece — call Scientology a money-making cult. Since moving its spiritual operations to Clearwater in 1979, the church has been at odds with city leaders and had numerous lawsuits filed against it.

The church also has refused to pay property taxes since 1983, despite Pinellas County's contention Scientology is not a religion and thus is not tax-exempt.

In the spring, the church settled a lawsuit with a Michigan man who

claimed church representatives pressured him into spending \$13,000 for Scientology services.

Details of the settlement were never disclosed. The plaintiff was represented by Palm Harbor attorney Barry Glenn, who now represents Wasserman.

The negative publicity will have no effect on the church's plans to build a \$42 million training center across the street from its headquarters in the old Fort Harrison Hotel, Haworth said.

The proposed six-story, glass-enclosed building will replace the decaying Gray Moss Inn downtown.

Plans first were announced for the building in March, and church leaders had hoped the Gray Moss would be demolished by now. But, obtaining city permits has taken longer than expected, Haworth said.