



READY TO ROLL

The Scientologists prepare to open a studio in Gilman Hot Springs.
Films will be educational, and won't star Tom Cruise

Above, a movie set inside the Church of Scientology International's \$7 million film studio in Gilman Hot Springs north of Hemet is ready for filming.

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/The Press-Enterprise

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The Press-Enterprise

GILMAN HOT SPRINGS

Talk of movies and Scientology usually leads to mention of John Travolta and Tom Cruise.

But don't expect to see the church's best-known members on the set when its new \$7 million film studio in Gilman Hot Springs opens Saturday.

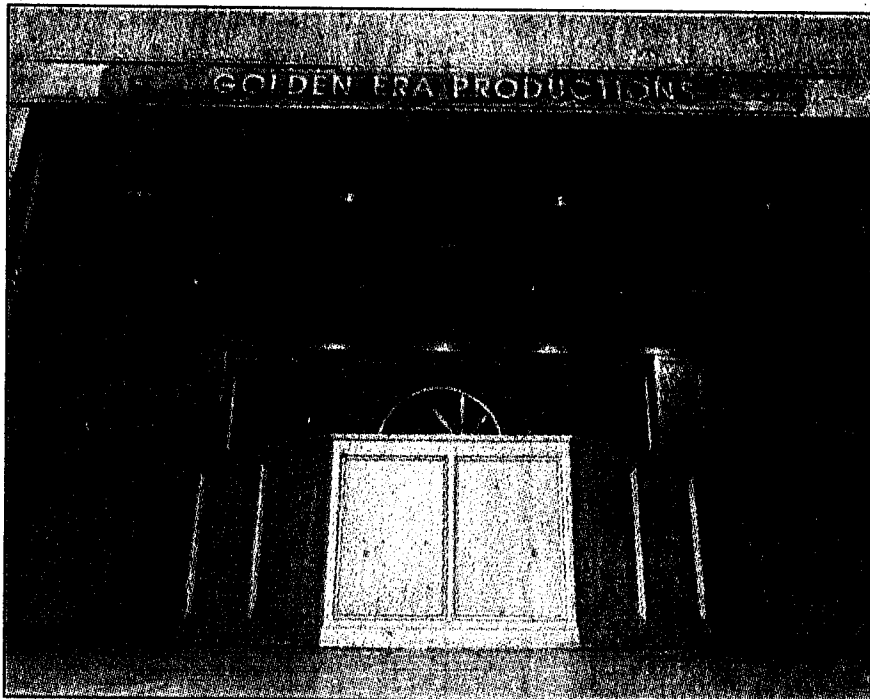
Golden Era Productions makes religious training and education films, not blockbusters needing big-name talent to sell tickets, general manager Ken Hoden said.

Films like "The Solo Auditor" and "The History of the E-Meter" teach members how to apply the principles of a modern science of mental health as outlined by L. Ron Hubbard, who founded the Church of Scientology International, Hoden said.

The church's goal is to help people live happier, more fulfilling lives by clearing them of negative experiences, called engrams, through Dianetics auditing sessions.

Those auditing sessions were scripted in great detail by Hubbard. In Scientology, once a member is cleared of engrams, the thetan, the spirit which animates the body and uses the mind, regains

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Films made by Golden Era Productions teach church members how to apply the principles of Scientology founder L. Ron Hubbard.

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STUDIO

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ages-old abilities. At that point it reaches the state of Operating Thetan, one who is at "knowing and willing cause over life, thought, matter, energy, space and time," according to "A Description of The Scientology Religion," published by the church in 1994.

Movie stars with remarkably cleft chins or dazzling smiles would distract from the training films which focus on understanding the processes.

Golden Era is preparing to showcase the new 35mm studio, a huge building called the Castle. It is styled like a castle, albeit with eggshell-colored stucco and blue-tiled roofs rather than mossy stones. Turrets and battlements are tempered by crepe myrtle trees and a large reflecting lake.

The Castle is the dominating feature of the church's 520-acre Gilman complex straddling Highway 79 behind guarded gates and wrought-iron fences. Hubbard thought the rugged foothills of the San Jacinto Mountains looked like the Scottish Highlands, so the castle theme started in 1988 with the first renovation of 35 buildings that used to be the Massacre Canyon Inn resort. All the buildings sport the same tile roofs and architectural design.

Golden Era, which includes filmmaking, marketing and graphics and a boarding school, is staffed by 750 of the church's elite. They belong to the Sea Organization, called the Sea Org, a fraternal order of Scientologists who pledge to serve the church for eternity.

Eighty-five people work in the film studio. Another contingent handles translating the church's materials into 53 languages. Religious Technology Center employees protect Scientology trademarks and service marks.

Scientology is practiced in 125 countries, with the church claiming more than 8 million members. Money parishioners pay for auditing, training and other services at local churches finances Golden Era, Hoden said. In return, the churches receive the films, books, cassettes and other materials that members use to reach the Operating Thetan state.

Almost from its inception in 1954, Scientology has been controversial. Opponents, particularly former members, have challenged its theories and practices. When the film operation moved from La Quinta to Gilman Hot Springs in 1978, the church did not acknowledge that it owned the property for two years, leading some San Jacinto Valley residents to say it was trying to hide its presence.

After a 25-year legal battle, the IRS granted all Scientology's entities tax-exempt status as religious organizations in 1993.

The Castle

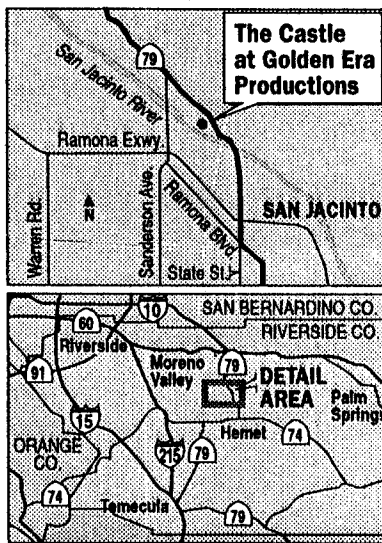
Golden Era Productions, which makes films for the Church of Scientology, is opening a new \$7 million film studio in Gilman Hot Springs. Here are some facts about the facility, which is designed to look like a castle:



- 75,000 square feet
- Equipped for 35mm; existing facility shoots only 16 mm
- Capable of drawing 1 million watts of electricity to power 600 studio lights
- Sound and lighting links required more than 85 miles of wire
- Air conditioning ducts are more than 6 feet in diameter
- Main sound stage is surrounded by 53 rooms, including sound recording booths, make-up studios, set design and construction facilities, a library and offices
- Main sound stage ceiling is more than three stories high
- Exterior has 18 turrets and battlements

Source: Golden Era Productions

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For years, critics have claimed that the Golden Era complex is also the secret headquarters of the worldwide operation, a contention church officials have denied. Hubbard, a science fiction writer whose book "Dianetics, the Science of Mental Health," became a best-seller and led to formation of the church, was last seen in public there in 1980. He died six years later at the church's San Luis Obispo County ranch.

In lawsuits, others have maintained that wayward Sea Org members have been imprisoned at Gilman Hot Springs. Officials counter that people who make those allegations are being paid to lie about the church.

In recent years, Golden Era officials opened the facilities to the community. Weekly tours are offered. Business and charitable groups hold fund-raisers and social events at the golf course and on a full-scale clipper ship replica.

Construction is under way on both sides of the highway. Dormi-

tories to house about 1,000 people are being built, as well as a guest house and movie screening building. Hoden said long-term plans call for adding nine holes and seven man-made lakes to the golf course and six more buildings to the complex.

The Castle will overlook the golf course expansion. The center of the building is a three-story-tall sound stage that can hold eight to 10 large movie sets, said Lisa Schroer, an assistant director who has worked at Golden Era since 1982. A massive green screen is stretched along two walls to allow special effects graphics to be inserted behind actors and sets.

Surrounding the stage is a honeycomb of rooms, all appointed in the same blonde wood and ceramic floor tile. Tartan-patterned carpet covers the halls and stairways and main actors' dressing rooms. Each room is identified with wooden plaque that includes the phrase, "In its own right each film is memorable." There are many framed Hubbard quotations and black-and-white photographs of him.

All employees are required to take an actor's course to learn about acting, directing, camera operations and more, according to spokeswoman Muriel Dufresne, and most end up in at least a few films. They may try out for a plum role or blend into a restaurant scene as an extra.

Most employees are sent outside for specialized training in the skills Golden Era needs, Hoden said. For instance, grips go to Los Angeles to learn how to move a camera.

To make the lessons more memorable, the training films tell stories illustrating how a Scientology process, or technique, is used, Dufresne said. Castile Canyon, where Golden Era runs a boarding school, stood in for South Africa in a film about auditing, the church's principal counseling technique. Hoden said animals, including zebras, were airlifted in to provide authenticity.

Another film set in a spaceship in outer space showed a technical procedure done when someone is being audited, Dufresne said. During auditing, an E-Meter, or elec-

tropsychometer, measures a person's responses when discussing intimate details of his or her life. It is similar to a lie detector. An auditor interprets the responses.

Four full-time writers turn screen treatments Hubbard wrote into scripts using research on period dress and history undertaken in a loft library above the entry foyer. Hubbard reportedly left 50 treatments outlining his theories when he died.

The first film shot at the new studio will explore Hubbard's prescriptions for educational success, showing how from early Greece to the present, parents and society have educated children to be productive people, Hoden said. Applying Scientology technology can help children overcome misunderstandings and reach their dreams, he said.

Sets under construction include a 1970s-era classroom complete with a picture of then-President Jimmy Carter on the wall, a Greek facade with mottled gray columns and a turn-of-the-century classroom with carved-legged desks molded in plastic on site in a vacuum form machine.

Employees make many of the props and recycle them. One room is already full of doors, arches, pieces of luggage and other leftovers from movies produced in the old 16mm studio.

After an invitation-only ribbon-cutting event for area dignitaries, vendors and others Saturday, the public will be able to make reservations to tour the facility as part of Golden Era's regular Sunday-afternoon tours by calling 654-5347.

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