

**THE TIMES PUBLISHING COMPANY**  
**Today's News** From the pages of the **St. Petersburg Times**

**The Front Page** **Scientologist hospitalized after jump into harbor**  
**Metro & State**

**Business** By THOMAS C. TOBIN

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**Editorials & Letters** CLEARWATER - A barefoot woman ran between two Church of Scientology buildings early Saturday before jumping into Clearwater Harbor, where police took her into protective custody for a psychiatric evaluation.

**Local Editions**

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**Classified Jobs** As the incident unfolded over more than three city blocks downtown, a patrol officer tried twice to ask the woman if she needed help, police said. They said she and a Church of Scientology security guard behind her kept running and eventually she was found by police in shallow Clearwater Harbor.

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Scientology attorney Elliot Abelson said Saturday that the woman had a personal emergency at a Scientology building, the Sandcastle hotel, and was running to get there from the Fort Harrison Hotel.

The guard was trying to help her, Abelson said. "The guard was absolutely not running after her."

The woman, a 36-year-old Scientologist visiting from New Jersey, told Clearwater police she was not trying to get away from the church or church officials during her pre-dawn sprint through downtown.

Police said the woman appeared distraught and was admitted to Morton Plant Hospital under the Baker Act, which empowers officers to seek mental evaluations for people who appear likely to harm themselves or others.

The woman's two children, estimated to be ages 2 and 7, were found sleeping in her room on the seventh floor of Scientology's Fort Harrison Hotel, said police spokesman Wayne Shelor, who refused to release the woman's name.

He said the children were fine and were in the custody

of the state Department of Children and Families.

The incident comes as Clearwater police and state law enforcement officials investigate the case of another 36-year-old Scientologist, Lisa McPherson, who died in 1995 after a 17-day stay at the Fort Harrison.

McPherson also had behaved oddly in public, taking off her clothes at the scene of a minor accident. She too was taken to Morton Plant Hospital for a psychiatric evaluation but fellow Scientologists intervened, saying psychiatry was against her religion. They promised to take care of her and took her to the Fort Harrison.

McPherson entered the hotel in good physical shape. After an autopsy, the medical examiner said she had suffered severe dehydration.

McPherson's family has alleged in a lawsuit that she was isolated and held against her will as part of a church procedure to cure what Scientology calls a "psychotic break." Church officials say McPherson was isolated, but did not undergo any procedure and was free to come and go. They say she was well cared for and that they did all they could after she suddenly became ill with a severe staph infection.

On Saturday, Officer Terry Kelly saw the woman run out the front door of the Fort Harrison and head north on Fort Harrison Boulevard, Shelor said. She was dressed in a shirt and jeans with no shoes or socks, and was being followed by a security guard, he said.

"She was in a full-gait run," Shelor said. Kelly "described her as wild-eyed," Shelor said.

Shelor said the McPherson case had no bearing on how the department handled the Saturday incident.

"At 5:40 in the morning, this tends to catch the eye of a police officer, regardless of where it happens," Shelor said. "He was concerned for her well-being . . . It was imperative that a police officer speak with the woman and determine if she needed assistance."

Shelor said Kelly caught up to the woman at the city's main library three blocks from the Fort Harrison and asked if she needed help. He said the woman and the security guard continued running.

After that, he said, the woman cut through a hedge at the old chamber of commerce building at Osceola Avenue and Drew Street and ran to the Sandcastle, a church retreat overlooking Clearwater Harbor.

The officer again tried to talk to the woman as she paused briefly near a man who appeared to be a Sandcastle manager or representative, Shelor said. But she bolted into a Sandcastle building and a short time later was seen in the harbor, just beyond a 6-foot sea wall at the west end of the property.

The water was only about a foot deep, and the woman was unhurt except for a cut on her foot, Shelor said.

An officer was dispatched to the Fort Harrison after the woman mentioned her two children, he said.

Police placed her into protective custody and took her to headquarters to be interviewed, Shelor said. They decided to admit her under the Baker Act in part because of a note they found in her room at the Fort Harrison, he said. Shelor would not disclose the note's contents.

Also, Shelor said, "she was speaking and acting irrationally. Clearly, she was trying to do harm to herself."

Abelson, the church attorney, said the woman and her children checked into the Fort Harrison on Friday night. He said she appeared in the lobby holding two pillows at about 5:40 a.m.

A guard saw her and asked if he could help her, he said.

Church spokesman Brian Anderson said she asked a security guard whether he had a car available. The guard said he did not, Anderson said.

The woman told the guard there was an emergency at the Sandcastle and that she needed his help, Anderson said. Then she ran out the door, he said.

The guard radioed to alert the Sandcastle then headed out to assist the woman, Anderson said.

Abelson said the guard was a block behind the woman. At the Sandcastle, he said, police asked her whether she was being chased. She responded that the

guard was helping her, then ran into the Sandcastle, Abelson said.

"This is not an escape," he said. "This is a person going from one church building to another."

Anderson said the woman had told church guards and police that she was troubled about the death of her husband last year. He said the woman's family has arrived in town to help her and her children.

He said he did not know what the woman's emergency was. He also said the church would not intervene for the woman at the hospital.

"It's a private matter," he said.

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