



# STRAIGHT

*Drug Rehabilitation Agencies  
Straight Inc.*

Six directors have resigned, but program officials say lives are

By WILLIAM NOTTINGHAM  
St. Petersburg Times Staff Writer

Since Straight Inc. opened last year as Pinellas County's newest juvenile drug treatment program, at least six corporate directors have resigned to protest its management and treatment techniques.

One director has accused the nonprofit corporation of "misfeasance, malfeasance and nonfeasance." The brunt of the criticism has fallen on Executive Director James E. Hartz.

Hartz, 29, is a clinical psychologist with no prior experience in drug rehabilitation.

In a joint resignation last August, three directors said that neither Hartz nor Program Director Helen R. Petermann "have the necessary qualifications to rehabilitate preteens or teens who have a drug or alcohol problem. Furthermore, we feel we cannot recommend Straight Inc. to our friends or citizens of our community."

**HARTZ AND** Board President Melvin F. Sembler dispute the charges, calling the resignations insignificant.

"We've got nothing to hide — we're saving lives," says Sembler. "These individuals don't know how a board functions. Something must be right; we've got 200 kids in the program."

Sembler said several of the former directors were invited to discuss their grievances at a board meeting; but they declined.

A former program volunteer also says that she, Hartz and others once witnessed Mrs. Petermann maliciously kicking a youth who was passively resist-

ing Straight officials.

Hartz flatly denies the incident, as does Mrs. Petermann.

"I sure wish they (the disgruntled former directors) would get off my back," Mrs. Petermann said. "They would like to see this (program) go down the drain."

**USING PEER-**pressure behavioral modification on juveniles from 12 to 18, Straight was born after a heavily criticized treatment program known as The Seed left Pinellas in 1975.

Judges have sent many youths to Straight rather than to jail. Since it received a \$50,000 federal grant last year, the program has had 369 clients. Fifty-one have completed the program, and 110 have received "incompletes," meaning they were either withdrawn, referred to another agency or they ran away. The program charges parents a fee of \$400 per juvenile, but officials say the fee is not mandatory.

Youth authorities and parents have praised Straight as being an effective rehabilitation program run without the "pressure tactics" associated with The Seed.

But former director Theodore Anderson of St. Petersburg disagrees. "It (Straight) has many of the poor points of the Seed and few of the good points. If I had to recommend one (program), I'd recommend The Seed."

"They (juveniles) are 'straight' while they're there, but it's out of fear," said Carolyn Henson, a

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He acknowledged being used to discipline

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St. Petersburg Times  
— JOE TONELLI

**Family swears by Straight, youth says he was beaten there —**

# NIGHT

## Six directors have resigned, but drug program officials say lives are being saved

*Drug Rehabilitation Agencies Inc. Straight Inc.*

last year as Pinellas County's newest juvenile treatment center, six corporate directors have resigned to promote more effective treatment techniques. The nonprofit corporation of "misfeasance, malfeasance and abuse of the criticism has fallen on Executive Director Hartz.

Hartz, a clinical psychologist with no prior experience in the field, was named director last August, three directors said that they had resigned. Program Director Helen R. Petermann said she had no qualifications to rehabilitate preteens or teenagers who have a drug or alcohol problem. Furthermore, she said, "we cannot recommend Straight Inc. to our citizens of our community."

**HARTZ AND** Board President Melvin F. Sembler said the charges, calling the resignations insignificant. "We've got nothing to hide — we're saving lives," Sembler said. "These individuals don't know how to do the functions. Something must be right; we've got to get the kids in the program."

Sembler said several of the former directors were asked to discuss their grievances at a board meeting but they declined.

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ing Straight officials.

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former program volunteer and wife of former director L. Hap Henson.

**SHE SAID** several former program counselors and clients have told her that juveniles have been mistreated while in Straight.

Hartz said that rumors of mistreatment constantly surface about the drug program, but no incident has ever been proven.

He acknowledges that three basic techniques are used to discipline "disruptive" clients:

✓ "Time out," known by some clients as "solitary confinement," consists of placing a juvenile in a room by himself, while a counselor stands outside and periodically checks to see if the client is all right.

One 16-year-old former Straight client claims she was kept in "solitary" for five days in a row. For three of those days, she says, her arms and legs were bound by large strips of canvas. Hartz denies the charge.

✓ "Running," where juveniles are "exercised" — forcibly if necessary.

Several persons interviewed by *The St. Petersburg Times* say they saw clients kicked, grabbed by the hair and otherwise roughly treated during the "exercises." Hartz also denies those allegations.

✓ "Marathon sessions," known to some clients as "come downs," where a group of counselors will yell remarks designed to provoke the client into feeling guilty.

See STRAIGHT, 2-B

**Family swears by Straight, youth says he was beaten there — two views, 2-B.**

On Sept. 26, 1976 — less than a month after Straight began treating juveniles — then-Executive Vice President Arthur W. Bauknight and Straight's original incorporating secretary-treasurer resigned.

In his letter, Bauknight warned that the board "is not operating as required by Florida statutes, its charter and bylaws."

**"THERE ARE** voids in your insurance coverage," wrote Bauknight, a St. Petersburg insurance agent. "Money is being handled by nonbonded employees and officers." No "basic safety rules" had been developed by the corporation "to protect others from unreasonable risk of bodily harm, loss or damage," he wrote.

When clients are admitted to Straight, now based in a warehouse off Park Street N in St. Petersburg, their hair is usually cut short. Some of the juveniles resist, and Bauknight says that the corporation lacked insurance to cover hair-cutting accidents.

Hartz said he is unsure if such accidents are covered in the corporation's current insurance policy. But he doubted the need for such coverage.

"It (a hair-cutting accident) has just never happened," he said. "I could get hit (by a car) walking across the street."

Bauknight's wife Lila remained on the board until last July, when she also resigned in protest.

**"MAJOR DECISIONS** involving the operation of Straight Inc. are made without consultation of board members or their approval," she wrote. Under state law, the board is legally responsible for Straight's operations. "Straight Inc., in my opinion, does not operate along the guidelines envisioned by its founders."

"They couldn't get their own egos out of the way," Hartz said of the disgruntled former directors. "They just wanted to run the whole thing. They were upset that the program could be run so well without them."

"This board has come through some growth problems, and people have left. These people were trying to be so damned picky. Any group would have this problem — go to any church board."



**James Hartz:** *"I really don't like digging up this garbage."*

After working in a Georgia rehabilitation program for retarded children, Hartz joined Straight in July 1976. He was recommended for the job by Fred Forsyth, then the state official in charge of licensing drug treatment programs in Pinellas. Forsyth since has left the post.

**SOME FORMER** board members say they were given the impression at one meeting that by hiring Hartz, Straight would be assured of a state license. But current board member Ray Waymire, widely respected for his work with juveniles, said Hartz's friendship with Forsyth was of no consideration in the hiring.

"I really don't like digging up this garbage," Hartz said. He said he tried to make the complaining directors happy — "we did everything we could."

He compared them to small children. "If they didn't get their candy, they would go home."