

Founder uncertain about future of boarding school in Abbeville County

By Kirk Brown

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Narvin Lichfield spent a night in the Abbeville County Detention Center last month, and now he is having second thoughts about reopening his boarding school for troubled teens.

"I might just liquidate the property," Lichfield said in an interview last week. "I am tired. I am worn out."

Abbeville County sheriff's deputies stopped Lichfield near the campus of the former Carolina Springs Academy boarding school, which Lichfield founded, north of Due West at 3:30 p.m. Jan. 28, according to sheriff's office records. Lichfield was taken into custody after the deputies determined he was driving with a suspended license and that his green Nissan sport utility vehicle was uninsured.

As a result of a problem accessing the National Crime Information Center computerized database on the evening of Lichfield's arrest, the detention center staff was unable to check whether he had any outstanding warrants. So Lichfield, 49, was held at the jail overnight.

While at the detention center, Lichfield also was served with three courtesy summonses from Greenwood County involving about \$2,000 in bad checks written on the boarding school's closed bank account.

Lichfield, who divides his time between South Carolina, Utah and Costa Rica, said he was out of the United States when a former boarding school employee forged the three checks in question.

Saying he was unaware that his license had been suspended because of an unpaid parking ticket, Lichfield also said he has been unfairly targeted by the Abbeville County Sheriff's Office.

In an e-mail to both a business associate and his attorney, Lichfield said Abbeville sheriff's deputies "did surveillance on my property for over a week seeking entrapment of me on a parking ticket."

"Why didn't they tell me about the suspended license when I spoke with Abbeville County investigator Mr. Patrick Thompson and specifically asked if there was anything

outstanding I needed to take care of when I came back to (South Carolina)?" Lichfield asked in the e-mail.

"Do they do weeklong stakeouts on only people like me and throw them in jail overnight with the excuse the NCS (NCIC) computer was down?" Lichfield wrote. "This moves now to harassment, civil rights violations and federal discrimination of me personally."

Marion Johnson, the chief deputy for the Abbeville County Sheriff's Office, denied Lichfield's accusations involving the January arrest.

"There was no weeklong stakeout for Mr. Lichfield," Johnson said. "Deputies were acting on information they had received just prior to his arrest."

He added, "Mr. Lichfield was arrested, booked, bonded and released by the judge just like many others before him."

Lichfield said he went to the Greenwood Police Department on Monday to discuss the bad checks. He said he filed three affidavits stating that the checks were forged and also submitted samples of his handwriting. Lichfield also submitted an affidavit signed by two former Carolina Springs Academy administrators.

That affidavit says the former employee suspected of forging signatures on the checks previously stole \$50,000 worth of big-screen TVs and antique and hunting firearms from Lichfield's home in Abbeville County. One of the stolen firearms later turned up at a Greenwood pawn shop, according to the affidavit, which also states that the former employee left South Carolina in Lichfield's Toyota Camry.

Lichfield unveiled plans in December to reopen Carolina Springs as a Christian boarding school for troubled teens that would be exempt from state licensing requirements.

After finding numerous violations of state rules in the course of 19 site visits conducted in an 18-month period, the South Carolina Department of Social Services revoked Carolina Springs' license in 2009. Lichfield founded the school in 1998.

In his recent interview Lichfield talked about seeking bankruptcy protection for Carolina Springs. But the later the same day he forwarded a prospectus detailing how he is seeking to raise \$1 million from investors to reopen the boarding school.



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