

Government

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By BRIAN MARTINEZ
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7 arrested at Piecemakers store

COSTA MESA — Seven members of the Piecemakers Country Store — a religious-based, commune-type business in Costa Mesa — were arrested today after dozens of the workers refused to allow Orange County health officials to inspect the group's restaurant.

Health Agency officials, district attorney's investigators and Costa Mesa police officers arrived with an inspection warrant about 11:30 a.m. Floor manager Linda Ryan, who said she was speaking for the Piecemakers, would not allow the authorities to enter the Adams Street business.

The leading officer lightly pushed Ryan aside at the front door and started making his way to the kitchen to open the back door, Ryan said, and about 20 members of the group stood in his way. The officer forced his way through all of them, opened the back door, and let the delegation in, Ryan said.

“We felt violated,” sales clerk Joanna Nelson said. “It was like an invasion.”

Sometime after the inspection began, Piecemakers founder and leader Marie Kolasinski tried to remove an inspector's thermometer from a pot of soup. A fracas broke out, Kolasinski said, and five women and two men were arrested.

District attorney's spokesman Mark Macaulay identified the people arrested and the charges:

- Kathleen Louise Needham, obstruction of justice.
- Douglas Dorsey Follette, assault.
- Marie Kolasinski, assault on a health inspector.
- Deborah Lindsey Scherfee, obstruction of justice.
- Kerry Lyn Parker, assault.
- Judy Marie Haeger, battery.
- John Fredrick Ready, obstruction.

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The inspection warrant was acquired after Piecemakers employees denied access to the kitchen Oct. 6, Health Agency spokesman Howard Sutter said.

Piecemakers' food service permit allows the group to sell only pre-packaged food, Sutter said. The group prepares and sells hot food at the business.

"This is all about freedom to conduct our lives, serve the Lord, make a living and service the community without government intervention," Nelson said. "God founded this business, and that's why we take a stand."

Members of the group say they share profits and ownership of the business, which mainly sells quilting supplies. Piecemakers, founded in 1978, also runs a hair salon and offers custom interior design and construction services. The group has had a history of trouble with the county. Members once settled two libel lawsuits filed against them by individual county health inspectors.

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