

# Government

## **Police step in at store altercation Health department officials say that group interfered with inspectors.**

*By Lauren Vane*

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Seven members of a Costa Mesa religious sect were arrested Wednesday after they allegedly interfered with Orange County Health Care Agency officials who were serving a warrant to inspect the facility's kitchen, officials said.

The Piecemakers Country Store — a craft business and restaurant operated by a group long at odds with the county health department — was inspected despite the group's objections, when officials from the health department and Orange County District Attorney's office served a warrant at the 1720 Adams Ave. facility, officials said.

“Some individuals began interfering with this process and started yelling obscenities and had to be arrested so that the Health Care Agency could complete its job,” said Mark Macaulay, spokesman for the district attorney's office.

The health department sought the help of the district attorney's office after the Piecemakers refused entrance to inspectors during a routine inspection Oct. 6, said agency spokesman Howard Sutter.

Agitated Piecemakers clustered together outside the kitchen door Wednesday just moments after the police had arrested their founder and six other members.

“They put our 84-year-old founder in handcuffs!” member Linda Ryan said.

Leigh Anne Kolasinski, 19, the granddaughter of the Piecemakers founder Marie Kolasinski, watched police handcuff her grandmother and take her away.

“She doesn't like the health department... she was sick of them. They come in and pester everybody,” Leigh Anne Kolasinski said.

Police and health department officials came to the door, and her grandmother wouldn't let them carry out the inspection, said Leigh Anne Kolasinski, who works at the county store.

*Piecemakers Country Store*

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Piecemakers Kathleen Louis Needham, Deborah Lindsey Scherfee and John Fredrick Ready were arrested on suspicion of obstruction of justice. Douglas Dorsey Follette, Marie Kolasinski and Kerry Lyn Parker were arrested on suspicion of assault. Judy Marie Haeger was arrested on suspicion of battery. As of late Wednesday, prosecutors had not filed charges and the seven were free on bail, officials said.

The Piecemakers prepare food in their kitchen and serve it in the tea room, which is open to the public. The store does not have a permit to sell food prepared on site. Instead, they have a permit that allows them to sell prepackaged food, Sutter said.

Piecemaker members said they do not welcome health inspectors inside their store. Their kitchen has been inspected before, but “nothing’s ever good enough,” said Ryan.

“We do not need a health inspector to tell us how to make soup,” Ryan said.

A large white sign affixed to the store’s front door clearly spells out the Piecemakers’ viewpoint.

“Under protection of the 4th amendment to the Constitution of the United States all government inspectors are prohibited from entering these doors,” the sign reads.

The state health and safety code requires that a licensed establishment, such as the country store, allow health department officials to conduct periodic inspections, Sutter said.

“Just because someone doesn’t have a permit, doesn’t exclude them from the law,” Sutter said.

The health department’s responsibility is to protect the public’s health and when inspectors aren’t allowed in, the public can be at risk of food-borne illness, Sutter said.

The customers are the only health inspectors they need, the Piecemakers asserted Wednesday.

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According to Sutter, the county Health Care Agency has had a long history of noncompliance with the group. In 1992, the Piecemakers agreed to close down their tea room and candy counter. In 2002, the Piecemakers settled out of court when two Health Care Agency employees sued the organization for libeling them in the group's newsletter and in newspaper advertisements.

Inside the large country store facility, Piecemakers sell homemade crafts and food.

For members, it's both a business and a way of life, said Piecemakers' Ryan.

"We are here because this is God's business," Ryan said. "We all have a very close relationship with him."

Laguna Niguel resident Pam Cameron, a regular customer at the Piecemakers County Store, was just pulling into the parking lot when police arrived, she said.

"I just knew that's what they were here for," Cameron said, well aware of the Piecemakers' struggle with the county health department.

Cameron said she loves coming to country store because the employees are "so kind and friendly."

She's eaten there many times, once at the kitchen table, and never has had a bad experience, she said.

"Everything is spotlessly clean; everything's wonderful," Cameron said.

\* LAUREN VANE covers public safety and courts.

— Staff writer Lindsay Sandham contributed to this story.