

Testimony ends in deprogramming trial

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By Dave Varga
staff writer

Two women, who said they were kidnapped during a "deprogramming" attempt, weren't held against their will because they had no free will to exercise according to the testimony of one of the eight defendants on trial in Oakland County Circuit Court.

Bob Brandyberry, who headed the team of three deprogrammers and five security guards that held the women, testified that he shared the concern of Karen Larson of Bloomfield Hills that her daughters, Whitney Chase and Elizabeth Chase-Hayner, were the victims of a mind-controlling religious cult.

I guess from my point of view I question whether they had a will of their own," Brandyberry said Tuesday from the witness stand.

Six days of testimony by witnesses from both sides ended Tuesday, when the three deprogrammers and one of the five security guards testified as

witnesses. Closing arguments are expected to be made today before the jury is asked to decide on two counts of kidnapping for each defendant.

CHARGES STEM from an incident two years ago when the sisters were held Dec. 27-31 in Karen and Robert Larson's previously rented home at 5335 Shadow Lane in Bloomfield Township.

Elizabeth and Whitney were rescued late New Year's Eve when Bloomfield Township police and the FBI, acting on tip from the sisters' father, Anthony Chase of Washington, D.C., broke down the door of the house. Elizabeth was 18 and Whitney 21 at the time.

Although testimony showed the Larsons contacted, hired and paid Brandyberry to bring in the deprogrammers and guards, the Oakland County Prosecutor's office did not prosecute the Larsons.

Brandyberry said he was convinced

about 200 deprogrammings across the United States, Canada and Europe since 1979. About 20 of those involved friends, he said, and in some cases parents. When police raided the house, Brandyberry had a bag with \$1,000 in cash, of which \$1,500 was his fee, he testified.

THE SOFT-SPOKEN, heavy-set man told jurors how he had spent about 1 1/2 years as a member of the Rev. Sung Myung Moon's Unification Church. Eventually, Brandyberry rose to the position of state leader in Utah and Hawaii, which required a once-a-month flight to Moon's home, he said.

He also said he had been in two other cult-like groups, a transcendental meditation organization and a mind-development group. Each time, Brandyberry said, mind control techniques were used. Under cross examination Brandyberry said he left each of those groups without being deprogrammed.

Although he said he is unhappy if those people he deprograms return to their religious cults, Brandyberry said his goal is only to deliver information about the mind-controlling techniques. The deprogrammers do not try to change a person's religious beliefs,

Brandyberry insisted during cross examination by assistant county prosecutor James Mitchell.

"We tell (parents) our purpose for being there is to help their adult child make an informed decision," Brandyberry said.

WHEN QUESTIONED by defense attorney Larry Fugate, Brandyberry testified that he is still involved in doing deprogrammings. "Because I believe morally what I'm doing is right," he said. "Money is not a big factor. I have to live, pay the bills and buy equipment."

Brandyberry said he told Karen Larson and Bloomfield Township police about the legal consequences of holding the sisters. But he testified that he was aware of only the civil charges that might be brought against him, not the criminal charge (kidnapping).

"I felt, at the time, the illegal part would come if the girls went back and decided to bring charges civilly," Brandyberry said. Earlier, he had said, "The only time I've ever had any kind of legal repercussions have been in civil suits where there have been suits against me and the family for large sums of money."

Diane Murray, who was one of the two security guards to arrive two days after the deprogramming began, also testified Tuesday that she had never been told and did not believe holding the girls was against the law.

"I CAME UP here with the intention of helping someone . . . I never thought I would be accused of kidnapping," Murray said.

Murray said she, along with her sister-in-law Jennifer Junge, were called in for the \$100-a-day plus expenses job by her live-in boyfriend Richard Barry. Barry coordinated the team of security guards, according to testimony.

The guards were there, Murray said, to ensure the sisters did not hurt themselves and to protect the women in case their church group attempted to about them from the house.

Both Murray and Brandyberry testified that a large black car had driven slowly past the house Dec. 31, making the deprogrammers and guards fear an attempt by members of the Calvary Temple School of the Prophets in Sterling, Va., to physically take the sisters back.

night, Murray said she thought it was cultists breaking in, so she ran into Whitney's room and locked the door. "I was afraid that the group had come into the house and I was afraid of harm," Murray said.

Defendant Rodney Bales and his wife, Kathy Gannon, both testified that they were once members of a mind-controlling Bible-based cult. Both were deprogrammed by Bob Brandyberry.

Under cross examination, Bales said he was aware the Chase sisters were there against their wishes, but never heard them ask or saw them try to leave. This incident was his first time as a deprogrammer, he said.

The third deprogrammer, Cheryl Johnson Breislend, also took the witness stand Tuesday. Breislend said she worked about 20 deprogrammings and is working on a master's degree in educational counseling.

BREISLAND, WHO became interested in deprogramming after her brother joined the Unification Church, disputed earlier testimony that she told Elizabeth she would not be harmed as long as Elizabeth "didn't do anything stupid."

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