

School staff members persist despite problems

By JOHN STARK
Of the Herald Staff

Staff members at Anderson Creek School, formerly known as the Karum Group School, vow to carry on their work while a \$1.4 million judgment against the facility is being appealed.

Karum began, under the leadership of Larry Katz, as an experiment in collective living in the early 1970s. Eventually, collective members, including Fairhaven College students, built a geodesic dome and other facilities in Whatcom County that became a boarding school for troubled teen-agers.

After hearing more than three weeks of testimony that ended June 4, a Whatcom County Superior Court jury awarded \$1.4 million to six former members of the Karum Group collective.

During the trial, the plaintiffs claimed Katz had used mental coercion to get them to contribute their money and labor to the effort. They also alleged that students at the school had suffered mental, physical, and in three cases, sexual abuse, and they blamed Katz as being directly or indirectly responsible.

Katz and present-day Karum Group members indignantly deny the charges. In any

event, they say, Katz resigned as director of the school two years ago, and has since spent most of his time in California.

Ane Soriano, acting director of the school, said the verdict fulfilled her expectations.

"I didn't think (jurors) would go for the evidence. I thought they would go for the emotional appeal, and they did," Soriano said.

Dan Sooter, another present-day member, called the jury verdict "obscene."

"I never intended my contributions (to Karum Group) to go into the pockets of the plaintiffs or their attorney," said Sooter, who lives at the school, 5602 Mission Road, and teaches classes, coaches sports and does construction projects. During the trial, he testified that his salary is \$250 a month.

As Sooter sees it, the jury verdict unfairly gives the plaintiffs a claim on the entire school. That includes not only the fruit of his efforts, but also contributions of building materials and other things made by businesses and individuals in the community, Sooter said.

Katz, contacted by telephone in California, had little to say, other than to label the jury verdict a "real raw deal" for the school and the

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Supporters rally to school

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KAREN MARCOTT
Help for her son

"All the parents want to support the school and let the world out there know there's nothing wrong here at all," said Karen Marcott of Deming, whose son Brent has been a student at the Anderson Creek School for a year and nine months.

Marcott was rallying to the defense of a school whose finances and reputation may have been badly shaken by a civil lawsuit. A \$1.4 million jury verdict resulted against the school and Karum Group Inc. on June 6.

Marcott said she first consulted a psychologist about her son when he was 2½ years old, shortly after her marriage broke up. That was the

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