The Wayback Machine - https://web.archive.org/web/20060221074147/http://www.unmarriedamerica.org:…

April 11, 2005

Six in custody after academy riot

by Robert Malone
Hattiesburg American

Six students remain in custody at Forrest County Juvenile Detention Center on charges of disorderly conduct after a riot Friday night at Eagle Point Christian Academy, formerly Bethel Boys Academy, in Lucedale.

Seven other students, or cadets, at the home for troubled teenagers from across the country were taken to George County Hospital where six were treated for minor injuries and released to school officials. One was admitted to the hospital, according to a prepared statement from the George County Sheriff's Department.

No one at the hospital was able to comment Sunday night. Eagle Point director John Fountain could not be reached.

Meanwhile, four students ran away from the school Sunday afternoon, with three of them caught less than a mile from the school. A fourth remained at large.

George County Sheriff Garry Welford said the students were breaking windows and tearing up beds, chairs and other items during the Friday night incident.

"They were destroying the place," Welford said.

Two deputies arrived at the scene shortly after 11 p.m. Friday and off-duty officers were called in

because of the large number of students involved. By 3:30 a.m. school officials reported that all 122 students had been accounted for.

The disruption continued throughout the weekend, Welford said. Students did additional damage to the school Saturday afternoon.

Sheriff's officers remained at the school to keep the peace.

Students told Welford that the riot was sparked by a rumor that state investigators might arrive at the school over the weekend.

"They (students) wanted to make it seem like there was a real problem there," he said. "None of those kids like it down there."

The dormitory has been shut down because it's so badly damaged, Welford said, and until cleanup is completed, the school building is being used as sleeping quarters.

Efforts to reach Fountain on Sunday were unsuccessful. He took over Bethel Boys Academy from his father, Herman Fountain Sr., nearly two years ago.

The school has a history of abuse allegations and state investigations dating to 1988 when 72 children were removed from the school by state welfare officials.

At the time the school was called Bethel Home for Children. In 1990, a judge closed the school - then owned by Herman Fountain Sr. In 1994, Fountain reopened the school as Bethel Boys Academy.

In 2003, 13 boys were removed in connection with abuse allegations. The investigation resulted in an order to prohibit Fountain Sr. from having an active management role in the boys academy.

In October, the Department of Human Services investigated allegations of abuse, including one reported by George County Sheriff's Department. The other complaint came from a parent. The academy later was cleared.

Return to Home Page

The institution's name was changed from Bethel Boys Academy to Eagle Point Christian Academy in February.

Bethel Girls Academy near Petal, which is operated by Herman Fountain Jr. but has no official connection with Eagle Point, also has been in the spotlight for abuse allegations. Thirty-eight students were removed from the home for troubled girls amid an abuse investigation in May. And in February, 11 students fled the school claiming they had been abused by employees of the facility.