

Founder of Abbeville County boarding school won't be prosecuted on bad check charges

By Kirk Brown

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GREENWOOD — Narvin Lichfield won't be prosecuted in connection with about \$2,000 worth of bad checks written on the closed account of his former boarding school for troubled teens.

After being arrested Jan. 28 for driving with a suspended license near the now-closed Carolina Springs Academy in Abbeville County, Lichfield was served with three courtesy summons related to bad checks that were passed at Frugals ABC liquor store in Greenwood.

Lichfield and two other former administrators from Carolina Springs filed affidavits saying that an ex-employee at the boarding school had forged the worthless checks. Lichfield also submitted samples of his handwriting.

Last Wednesday a municipal judge in Greenwood ruled that the case against Lichfield will not proceed.

Court records show that Lichfield entered a no contest plea Feb. 16 on the charge of driving with a suspended license in Abbeville County. He said he paid a \$685 fine to resolve the matter.

Lichfield founded Carolina Springs Academy near Due West in 1998. The school for unruly children shut down in 2009 after state officials sought to revoke its license. Their decision was based on numerous violations found in the course of 19 site visits conducted over 18 months.

Although Lichfield has said he wants to reopen the facility as a Christian boarding school that would be exempt from state regulations, he is having trouble lining up investors.

"I don't know what we are going to do," he said Friday.

While the future of his boarding school in Abbeville County is shrouded in uncertainty, officials in Costa Rica this month closed a similar academy for troubled teens that was run by Lichfield's nephew.

The Costa Rican child welfare agency said it rescued a group of 20 American minors who allegedly suffered psychological and physical abuse at the Teen Mentor academy.

The academy had been operating since last year out of a hotel in the Pacific coastal town of Tárcoles de Garabito, according to multiple news outlets in Costa Rica.

Teen Mentor was run by Robert Walter Lichfield, who is the son of Narvin Lichfield's older brother, Robert Browning Lichfield.

Robert Browning Lichfield founded the Utah-based Worldwide Association of Specialty Programs and Schools the same year that Carolina Springs opened. Worldwide was affiliated with a network of boarding schools that at one point stretched from California to the Czech Republic. But its boarding school empire has crumbled in recent years as a result of the economic downturn and publicity about the deaths of two students and other allegations of abuse.

Costa Rican officials raided Teen Mentor after receiving a complaint from a therapist who had witnessed an altercation between two young people at the academy, Narvin Lichfield said.

Narvin Lichfield also previously operated a boarding school in Costa Rica that was called Academy at Dundee Ranch. Authorities arrested Narvin Lichfield after raiding the school in 2003. He was cleared of all charges in 2007.



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