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Ex-NXIVM trainer: Students are prey

Court filing says founder Keith A. Ranieri hunted sessions for sex, cash

BY JAMES M. ODATO Capitol bureau Published 5:00 am, Monday, November 22, 2010

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IMAGE 2 OF 2

Keith A. Ranieri of Clifton Park, founder of NXIVM,

COLONIE -- In court papers filed Friday, a former high ranking officer of NXIVM depicts the cultlike group as a self-help and ethics school that is secretly a place for its leader to explore opportunities for sex and gambling money.

Susan Dones, a trainer who ran the Colonie-based company's former Tacoma, Wash., center, told a bankruptcy court last week that **Keith A. Ranieri**, the creator of the teachings used in NXIVM's self-improvement courses, may have motives beyond the education of human potential.

Dones said NXIVM presents Ranieri "as the most honest, ethical, Nobel (sic), man who had the answers to mankind's problems" yet his training sessions are "used as a venue to stalk their students ... who might fit into Ranieri's profile of sexual conquest and who might be willing to 'give' Ranieri money to feed his gambling problem."

The NXIVM business, also known as Executive Success Programs, treats Ranieri, 50, of Clifton Park as its intellectual guru. It has attracted an estimated 12,000 students to long-term studies and short-term intensive programs aimed at "a new ethical understanding that allows us to build an internal civilization and have it manifest in the external world," as Dones said in court records.

More Information

Dones' accusations echo assertions raised in a California lawsuit involving a source real estate investment of Clare and [Sara Bronfman](#), who are major financial backers, students and leaders of NXIVM. In that case, records say Ranieri is the absolute leader of a cult with complete control over the Bronfmans. The records call him a man with many girlfriends and a gambling compulsion.

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That case disclosed he directed \$65 million in the Bronfmans' funds into losing commodities trades and encouraged them to make a roughly \$26 million investment in housing construction in Los Angeles that didn't pan out.

Ranieri also uses funds mined from NXIVM members to pay his legal bills in litigation that harasses whistle-blowers, Dones claims in the new filings Thursday in Washington. She said the NXIVM's litigation against her in her bankruptcy case is likely costing the company \$1 million monthly even though she has few assets.

She said Ranieri's personal behavior, which was inconsistent with his teaching, is a reason why she and eight other women left NXIVM in April 2009.

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Ranieri, who uses the name "Vanguard," and NXIVM President [Nancy Salzman](#), Dones claimed, acted maliciously toward members who were "sold on Ranieri being someone he is not and that NXIVM 'mission' is something it is not."

"I was informed and believe that Ranieri/Vanguard was having sexual relationships with multiple women, sometimes with more than one of them at the same time (many of these women were told that they were the chosen one; several of them were members of NXIVM's executive board which is a per se conflict of interest and all of them had to keep their relationship with Ranieri a secret from the NXIVM community because it was feared that many members were not 'evolved enough' to be able to deal with this information)," Dones stated in her court declaration.

She said that she has not shared trade secrets of NXIVM as alleged in a claim against her bankruptcy case brought by NXIVM. Students of the program, she said, are led to believe that leaders can do no wrong as they seek to teach ways to become "unified" - "whole and complete with no attachments to the outside world" by taking multiple, expensive advanced training courses.

As for operations, she said that one of NXIVM's officers bragged about an ability to forge signatures, suggesting that documents generated by the company are suspect. And she said the company may be dodging paying taxes.

"The destruction to NXIVM comes from within the upper, inner most leadership of the [NXIVM organization](#)," she said, calling herself a whistle-blower.

Albany lawyer [Stephen Coffey](#), who has been representing NXIVM in bankruptcy cases involving former members, did not return a call. And NXIVM attorney [Robert Crockett](#) in California said he was unable to speak to a reporter on matters involving the company.

Dones, who lists \$558,951 in assets and \$728,152 in debts, could not be reached.

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