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WEATHER: High 91, low 75,  
0% chance of rain. More, 6B

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# Scientologists settle death suit

■ Terms of the unexpected settlement are confidential in the wrongful death suit brought by the estate of Lisa McPherson.

By **ROBERT FARLEY**  
Times Staff Writer

A 7-year-old wrongful death lawsuit filed by the estate of Lisa McPherson against the Church of Scientology reached a surprise settlement this week, ending one of the most fiercely contested and enduring legal battles in Pinellas County history.

The out-of-court agreement ends the last remaining legal threat facing the church after the widely publicized 1995 death of McPherson, a Scientologist who died after 17 days in the care of church members in Clearwater.

Terms of the settlement, reached after several days of mediation in a St. Petersburg law office, were confidential.

"It's over," said church spokesman Ben Shaw. "We look forward to the future and carrying out our mission of helping people attain spiritual freedom."

Lawyer Luke Lirot, who helped Tampa lawyer Ken Dandar represent the McPherson estate in numerous legal cases spawned by the wrongful death lawsuit, said it was time to end the exhaustive and expensive legal battle.

"It was the best way to get these matters resolved and let everyone move on," Lirot said.


Dandar could not be reached for comment. He was attending to a sick relative, Lirot said.

The wrongful death lawsuit generated nightmarish publicity for the church. A lengthy trial promised international media attention.


That a settlement was reached Wednesday night was surprising, given the cavernous divide between the two sides.

Dandar had called past offers from the church "insulting." In one mediation, Dandar had offered \$1 million to settle the suit.

Please see **SCIENTOLOGY 6A**



McPherson died in 1995 in the care of church members.



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