

State revokes Star Ranch's license (Texas, Star Ranch) - June 17, 2006

Contributed by Administrator

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The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services revoked Star Ranch residential treatment center's license Friday, citing a pattern of serious issues and the two residents who died after incidents at the facility.

The revocation means Star Ranch can no longer serve any children and that is something Star Ranch founder and director Rand Southard said he plans to fight.

Southard has until June 30 to file for an administrative review to give him an opportunity to "discuss the adverse action with a designated member of the licensing staff and to provide additional information concerning the disputed issue."

"We're going to file for an administrative review and go for whatever we have to," Southard said. "When we get a plan, we'll let you know. I think the fact that they notified you (the Times) almost before they notified us is indicative of the way they're (the state is) doing things. It's pretty hard to do business with them."

The seven-page letter to Southard, cited four serious incidents at the facility which "posed an immediate threat to the health and safety of children."

"Your failure to demonstrate responsibility for compliance with minimum standards, rules, and other laws, your compliance history, and the danger that your continued operation would pose to the health or safety of children, DFPS is revoking your permit," the letter to Southard stated.

One of those incidences occurred on May 6, when 12-year-old Lenny Ortega of San Antonio was with a group of boys from Star Ranch riding bikes near a shallow water crossing on Johnson's Creek. The current sucked Ortega into a drainage pipe under the low water crossing. He died June 1 from injuries from the accident.

After that accident, DFPS removed 19 children who were in state custody from Star Ranch, leaving the facility with only three privately placed boys.

The other death occurred in December 2005 when 15-year-old Christening "Mikie" Garcia died after a staff member restrained him.

In addition to those deaths, on Dec. 29, 2005, a 17-year-old resident sexually assaulted an 11-year-old resident "in part because of the neglectful supervision by a caregiver," according to state documents.

Another sexual incident allegedly occurred between three children on Sept. 3, 2005 because one of the staff members "neglectfully supervised" the children, DFPS wrote.

"There has also been a disturbing repetition or pattern of deficiencies," the letter stated. "In the last several months there have been approximately seven citations of standards related to the abuse or neglect of children, four reason-to-believe findings for neglect, and one reason to believe for abuse."

DFPS placed the facility on evaluation on February 10 and informed Southard that "further deficiencies may result in the immediate revocation of your license."