

ing around the world with his new program, Avatar — he abandoned Scientology early last year — and says he already has licensed 119 centers in nine countries.

"I am at the point in the hurricane," he says. "I have a communication system at home that links me with the world, faster than the news does... And I thought: 'They're bothering me in Elmira?'"

What excites him now are his plans to stretch his global impact even wider. Palmer is working on a new program, called Wizard, which will cost \$20,000 when it is ready. It uses logarithms to predict places and times in the world in which significant changes can occur, and he can influence them. He says he cannot disclose too much yet, publicly, because it would interfere with one such project in Latin America.

Palmer thinks big, no question. And he claims to have netted big money. "Harry Palmer is a rich man," he says. "But those people (his former students) had nothing to do with it...I didn't make money from Scientology. I always had second jobs while I was working for the church." Star's Edge Research and Development — the Palmer-owned company through which he sells Avatar — is "certainly a very rich company."

But if Palmer is rich, he isn't ostentatious about his money. His center is bright, cheerful but not opulent — books, a wall tapestry, a number of paintings of angels. And he himself dresses casually. On this day he's attired in a khaki shirt and pants, black-tinted sunglasses and a brown leather jacket. He introduces Susan Sweetland and Miken Chappell, his two remaining employees, and Avra Honey Smith, his wife and partner; all are dressed in black. All, like Palmer, make gracious hosts.

In the reception room, his eye catches a man sitting in the corner. "Ah, I haven't seen this guy in a while. How have you been?" It is Palmer's father. They speak a moment, then the father tells his son: "Take care of what you have to. I'll wait for you for a few minutes." (Two hours later, the father is still there; but, oddly, they talk just for a few minutes, and the father departs.)

Upstairs, he points out the offices of his former employees. In the hallway, there is an arrangement of pictures that include Palmer posing with smiling customers. The pictures underscore another point about Palmer: He's a salesman — and like most salesmen, he points out that his customers are happy.

Ninety percent are happy, he said early last month. During last week's tour, the number had crept up to 95 percent. The following day, he used the figure 99 percent.

In fact, Palmer denies every single criticism levelled by his former staff members. He says he never saw what others say they

their losses, and he paid the money in some cases — but not because he really owed it.

"I had no responsibility to give any money back. It was a gesture of kindness," Palmer said. "They never thought they'd get it back. They were very grateful to me." But Hoffman and others say that's nonsense; Palmer's people demanded 100 percent, and Palmer would go no higher than half.

As it turned out, Palmer says he handed over \$70,000 in refunds within two weeks. But then one of his two German Shepherds was killed and the other — Greywolf — disappeared. And later at a meeting with members to discuss their money claims, when he began by asking for "their blessing for the safe return of Greywolf, one of the members told him he would get the dog back when he gave the money back.

"That's when I decided the whole thing was absurd," Palmer said, "...They were like sharks feeding." So he stopped paying.

Of course, that's not Palmer's only explanation for putting away his wallet. On another occasion, he said he stopped paying because he ran out of money.

And now he sees himself as the victim of bad publicity. At one point during last week's interview, he was interrupted by the office intercom. He picked up the phone, listened a moment and then said, "Miken (Chappell) received a threat call for me?" Twisting his high-backed, orange chair around to look out onto Water Street, he listened a moment longer and then hung up. "That was because of the articles." He punched his palm with his fist. "That was my first threat call."

Palmer can play tough, too, however. Although as leader of his organization he said he believed "anything that is said to me is confidential," once Hoffman went public with her criticism, Palmer wasted no time tossing out confidential details about Hoffman's personal life — information he had gleaned from her files.

Hoffman's ethics files, in fact, became a police issue last week when copies of them were sent to her along with a threatening note effectively ordering her to keep her mouth shut. After Hoffman complained to Elmira police, Palmer denied all responsibility. He says he didn't know there was anything embarrassing in the files; besides, added Palmer, anyone could have access to any members' files.

So where does this story end? Margie Hoffman, after 12 years at the center, no longer believes in Harry Palmer. She believes in herself. And Harry Palmer is still at it.