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Krishnas charged in abuse cases

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Multiple child molestation charges have been filed against a couple who operated an informal day-care center in the large Hare Krishna community in Palms, and additional counts could be filed soon, authorities said.

Kenneth Capoferri, 37, is accused of four counts of sexual abuse and his wife, Delia, 36, is accused of four counts of child endangerment in warrants obtained last month by the Los Angeles Police Department's sexually exploited child unit, said Detective Mike Jacobellis.

The alleged assaults took place from Nov. 1, 1982, to this past August at the unlicensed nursery at 3737 Watseka Ave., which is now closed.

Although only four counts were lodged against Capoferri, Jacobellis said authorities so far have identified eight cases of sexual abuse and additional charges are expected. The investigation is continuing, he said.

The Capoferris were arrested Sept. 28 in Columbus, Ohio, where they allegedly fled after being confronted by irate members of the Krishna community, Jacobellis said. The couple is fighting extradition to California.

According to David Liberman, an attorney for the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, the couple had been members of the religious sect for about six or seven years at various Krishna farms and communes. They had resided at the Palms site, located on Watseka Avenue at Venice Boulevard, for about two years.

Although the Capoferris were childless, they started the nursery because of an "affinity" for

children, Liberman said.

"The reaction here was primarily one of shock and disbelief at the beginning, then sadness, anger and outrage," Liberman said. "In order to live here in the community, there are strict moral rules and regulations and practices . . . that must be followed.

"This (incident) goes beyond anything that, that — it's simply unimaginable. That this could happen under the nose of a community . . . who follow moral guidelines . . . Everybody's just sick about it."

The sect numbers about 350 devotees who live primarily within a few blocks of the temple in sect- or privately-owned apartments and houses, Liberman said.

Jacobellis said medical authorities have identified eight cases of molestation involving acts of sodomy, sexual intercourse, oral copulation and rape by foreign object. The male and female victims ranged in age from 2½ to 5½.

The four victims involved in the warrants are two 5-year-olds and two 4-year-olds, Jacobellis said.

Jacobellis said Capoferri allegedly performed the sexual acts while his wife "witnessed the molestations and to our knowledge did not report them. She allowed them to continue to happen."

Mrs. Capoferri ran what Liberman described as an "informal" babysitting service for the devotees' children out of the small, wood-frame house down the block from the sect's temple. Capoferri worked as a handyman in the community.

About 15 to 20 children from 2½ to 6 were left at

the house daily under Mrs. Capoferri's care. There were gym and swing sets, a plastic swimming pool and other recreational equipment on the premises, Liberman said.

"The parents would bring their children there on an irregular basis," he said. "Some daily, some from time to time. It was not structured. It was a place where parents thought they could leave their children and have them be safe for any period for time."

Now, however, the facility has been closed down. "Everybody's real skittish now about starting anything up," Liberman explained.

The alleged molestations surfaced in September during a conversation between one of the victims and his parents. Persistent questioning by the parents led to revelations of other victims. Within three to five days, parents throughout the tight-knit community were questioning their children and tales of sexual abuse mounted, Liberman said.

Toward the latter part of September, the Capoferris were confronted by parents. "The parents were irate," Liberman said. "(Capoferri) emphatically denied it when confronted. We tried to conduct our own internal investigation. We had no reason to disbelieve our children, but at the same time he was emphatically denying the allegations. And frankly, we couldn't make a decision. We felt something had to be done immediately. So we turned our information over to professional authorities and sent the children" to St. John's Hospital's child study center, which received a \$100,000 county grant last year to study and treat child abuse.

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Krishna couple charged in alleged molestations

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A Hare Krishna couple who ran an unlicensed day-care center for the religious sect before fleeing the state this summer has been charged with molesting and endangering four young children entrusted to their care, prosecutors disclosed Thursday.

Ken Capoferri, 37, also known as Kurma, was charged with molesting two boys and two girls described as age 2 to 5, all children of sect members — at the center near the main Los Angeles Hare Krishna temple.

Police allege he used "considerable force" in molesting the youngsters from January 1983 until September 1983.

His wife, Delia, 36, also known as Dharma, was charged with

endangering the health of the four children by being aware of the molestations but doing nothing to stop them.

Some of the alleged victims told detectives that Capoferri also slapped, choked and spanked them, locked at least one child in a closet and drove some of the youngsters to an unknown location and took photographs of them. The nature of the pictures was not disclosed.

The charges are the latest in a series of child-molestation cases involving nursery schools and day-care centers in the Los Angeles area. In the largest such case, seven former teachers at the McMartin Pre-School in suburban Manhattan Beach face

more than 200 molestation charges.

A Hare Krishna spokesman was not available to comment on the charges.

The Capoferri allegedly fled California to escape prosecution shortly after the allegations surfaced, and authorities believe they were trying to return to Costa Rica, the woman's home country.

The suspects were arrested in

Columbus, Ohio, late last month, and are fighting efforts to extradite them back to Los Angeles. The district attorney's office, which filed the eight-count criminal complaint against the couple, has recommended they be held without bail.

According to police reports, the couple came under suspicion Aug. 19 when one of the children told her mother about being abused.