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For Immediate Release: October 14, 2003

## NYS Consumer Protection Board Gives Amherst Modeling Scam 'One Week to Get Out of Town'

CPB Chairperson wants Western New York office closed by Oct. 21 when public hearing on modeling scams takes place in Buffalo

Wilhelmina Scouting Network changes name in bid to avoid negative publicity; 9th name change in four years for modeling scam

The New York State Consumer Protection Board issued a consumer warning today that the Wilhelmina Scouting Network has changed its name to the "Web Style Network" in a bid to avoid negative publicity and continue its misleading sales practices.

"We want this scam out of New York State and we want their Western New York office closed by the time we get to Buffalo next week," said CPB Chairperson and Executive Director Teresa A. Santiago. "Our investigation has already led to the closing of their New York City office. Now we're focused on their Amherst operation and our message is simple -- you have one week to get out of town."

The Consumer Protection Board will be conducting a public hearing at 11 a.m. on Tuesday, Oct. 21, in the Mahoney State Office Building, 65 Court St., Buffalo. Victims of this and other modeling scams are invited to attend and tell their stories to the CPB. The state consumer agency is examining whether new state laws can help protect the public against modeling scams such as the Wilhelmina Scouting Network.

People interested in speaking at the hearing should contact the CPB at 1-800-697-1220.

The Wilhelmina Scouting Network, a nationwide modeling scam, has an office at 100 Corporate Parkway in Amherst. The Florida-based company announced Monday that it is changing its name this week to "Web Style Network" -- its ninth name in four years.

"No matter what they call it, this is still a misleading, over-priced and high-pressure sales operation that has young people walking a gang plank instead of a fashion runway," said Chairperson Santiago.

"The Wilhelmina Scouting Network has pressured young people and their parents into spending upwards of \$2,000 on a high-priced website and photography package -- all on the promise that this will lead to modeling jobs," said Chairperson Santiago. "But those jobs never appear and yet the money continues to disappear with a monthly fee of \$19.95 and high-pressure sales for trips to so-called modeling conventions in Florida.

"These aspiring models soon learn that while they're looking up at the stars -- the Wilhelmina Scouting Network is picking their pocket," said Chairperson Santiago.

The Wilhelmina Scouting Network is controlled by the Florida music producer, Lou Pearlman, and his company, Trans Continental Talent ("TCT"). Last week, Trans Continental Talent was sued by Wilhelmina Models, the long-established modeling agency, to remove the Wilhelmina name from the Wilhelmina Scouting Network.

"The company has now voluntarily surrendered the Wilhelmina name which is good news because many young people were drawn to this scam because of the famous Wilhelmina name," said Chairperson Santiago. "But we must continue to warn the public about these 'photo mills.'"

"Young people do not need to spend a lot of money upfront to enter the modeling world. Web Style Network and many other companies mislead and pressure young people and their parents into spending too much and getting too little. If a person has the right look, a modeling agency will spend money to promote that model -- not the other way around."

Last month, the CPB first issued a consumer warning against TCT's modeling network. Since then, TCT and one of its leading franchisees closed the Wilhelmina Scouting Network's Times Square office in Manhattan and 18 others across the country.

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