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MIRACLE RANCH ORPHANAGE FOUNDATION REVEALS ABUSE ALLEGATIONS FROM OVER 20 FORMER AND CURRENT BAJA, CA ORPHANAGE CHILDREN

DIRECTOR ANTONIO HERNANDEZ-FAVELA, ACCUSED OF MULTIPLE COUNTS OF CHILD MOLESTATION, MONEY LAUNDERING AND FRAUD, CONTINUES TO RUN THE ORPHANAGE, RECEIVE MONEY FROM AMERICAN CHARITIES

Anaheim, CA – March 11, 2008 – The Miracle Ranch Orphanage Foundation, an American non-profit organization based in Anaheim, CA, has brought to light allegations that 20 former and current wards of the Rancho El Milagro Orphanage in Baja, CA were physically and emotionally abused by Antonio (Tony) Hernandez-Favela, the Foundation's former director and American board member, and seven others. In addition, Hernandez-Favela faces allegations of money laundering and fraud associated with donations he has and continues to receive from American charities, some of which remain unaware of the serious crimes he and other American citizens are alleged to have committed while in Mexico. Miracle Ranch is warning American charities that extensive evidence supports the credibility of the allegations, including polygraph exams all the alleged victims have passed.

Steve Schinhofen, president of Miracle Ranch Orphanage Foundation, said, "People who run orphanages and exploit children must be brought to justice. If our desire is for Mexican children to receive the best care possible, people like Antonio Hernandez-Favela stand in the way. We trust the Mexican government to remove people who exploit children, and to do it now."

Among the accused is Rev. Dalton Webber, who is accused of molesting children while serving as a Miracle Ranch Orphanage board member between 1977 and 1980. He now serves as a Youth Baseball leader in Siloam Springs, Arkansas, where the families with which he works remain unaware of the allegations he faces. In 1995, he faced accusations in a separate civil suit to molesting five boys in Carlsbad, CA. In addition to his community work, he also writes a column for the local newspaper, the Siloam Springs Herald-Leader. Another accused American, John Swink, a convicted pedophile, is now retired and living in Lake Elsinore, CA. He faces accusations of molesting and raping children while visiting the ranch between 1977 and 1982 with the approval and assistance of Antonio Hernandez-Favela, according to victims' testimony. Swink was vice president of the orphanage board at the time.

"Beginning when I was 15 years old, Antonio made regular visits to my bedroom to have sex with me," said Ana Marie, a former orphan at Rancho El Milagro. "He often prayed with me after and asked forgiveness for what he did."

Jose Hernandez-Favela, Antonio's brother, is also accused of raping a developmentally disabled 13 year-old girl in addition to several other children at the orphanage between 1976 and 1991. Jose currently works at a school as a driver for young children.

The Miracle Ranch Orphanage Foundation provided funding for the orphanage from 1971 until October 2006. When allegations were brought to the Board that three of its former members and former staff had abused children at the ranch, the Miracle Ranch Foundation Board immediately launched a due-diligence investigation, including victim interviews, polygraph examinations and researching foundation records. A review of foundation records showed a documented history of molestation, abuse and threats of intimidation. Records also showed Antonio Hernandez-Favela was arrested and detained in Rosarito in April 2003 for being at a motel with a 12-year old girl.

After the alleged victims passed polygraph exams, the Board immediately hired attorneys and asked Hernandez-Favela, who was still running the orphanage, to cooperate with an internal investigation, but he refused and cut ties with the Board. Attempts were made to confront Rev. Dalton Webber but he also refused to cooperate. Since then, the Board has been working to bring the allegations against him and the others to the attention of law enforcement. In the meantime, Hernandez-Favela refuses to leave the orphanage, placing the current children there in the hands of an accused child rapist.

“Perpetrators who commit these kinds of heinous crimes count on there being no will to prosecute, no public outrage,” said William C. Bollard, a lawyer for the foundation. “We’re working to end the silence surrounding this case, so that we can protect those who still need our help and create a culture of accountability and care in Baja orphanages.”

The Mexican government is now actively involved in the investigation and the preparation of legal motions that will go before the courts of Mexico. In addition to sexual molestation and rape, allegations include that gifts and toys donated to benefit the children of Miracle Ranch orphans were not given to the children, but instead were sold for financial gain. Also, members of the Hernandez-Favela family use a 5500-square foot house as a personal residence, which the Foundation financed and built in 1987 solely for orphans transitioning out of the orphanage into independent life.

Hernandez-Favela continues to seek donations from a broad network of unsuspecting charities and non-profit groups throughout communities in San Diego, Orange County, Los Angeles and elsewhere. While the Mexican criminal justice system continues to investigate these complaints, Hernandez-Favela and his wife Edna, a U.S. citizen who was raised in Danville, California, continue to operate and live at Miracle Ranch. Rev. Dalton Webber continues to serve as a Youth Baseball leader in Siloam Springs, Arkansas, and John Swink lives in Lake Elsinore, CA. Jose Hernandez-Favela continues to be a bus driver in Ensenada with access to young children.

For complete transcripts of the alleged victims’ testimonies, go to <http://miracle-ranch.org/category/victims-testimonies/>.

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If you'd like more information about this story please visit www.miracle-ranch.org, or to schedule an interview with Steve Schinhofen, Attorney William C. Bollard, or alleged victims in this case, please call Mike Nason at 949-973-6033.