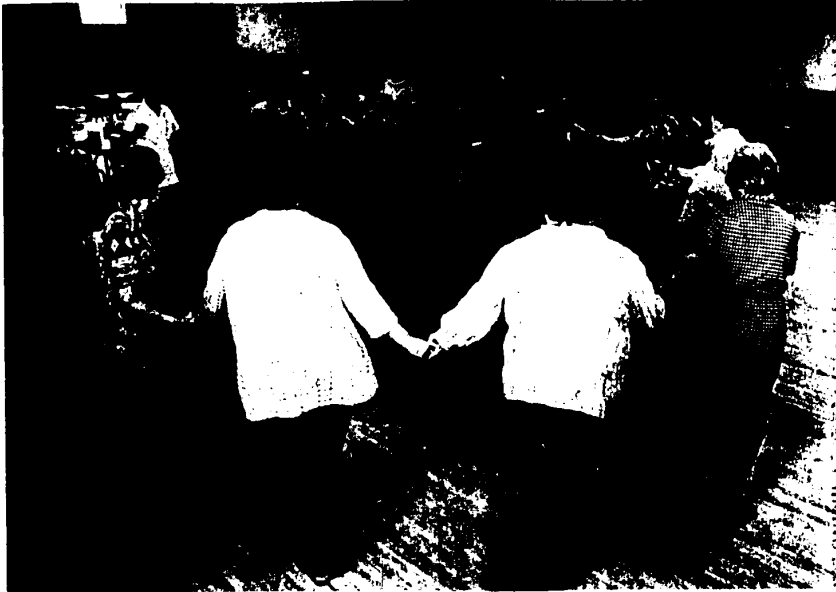




Mary Marshall (right) tries to get Mary Lou Nellis started on the right foot for a new dance. (Staff photo by Harry Mauthe)



Learning ethnic dances is a pleasant way to exercise and socialize at the same time. (Staff photo by Harry Mauthe)

Housing, transportation still dream for seniors

By CORINNE ABATT

"I have had such an injection of cheer from these people that this has become my second home."

—Rose Fevaris

Editor's note: This is the first in a series of reports on senior citizens in the Farmington-Farmington Hills area. In the weeks ahead we will visit other senior groups to learn about problems, leisure time activities and second and third careers.

The Farmington Area Recreation Commission estimates there are about 5,000 senior citizens in the immediate area. Some maintain their homes. A great many live in apartments and a sizeable group are in mobile homes. Their incomes vary from ample retirement incomes to pennies of less than \$100 a month. One of the most important needs of the large group—social activities and friendships with peers—is in part being met.

Housing, even with the 100-resident Baptist Manor and Maran Oakland West, is far from being adequate.

Senior Citizen Coordinator Loretta Conway estimates that of the 40-50 calls a week she receives on senior problems, at least 75 per cent are requests for housing or transportation.

Ms. Conway, who organized the weekday program for seniors at the American Legion Hall on Grand River, (rent-free) called "The Gathering Place," said approximately 450 persons attend functions there each month. Many come five days a week for the government subsidized hot lunch program.

On any weekday there are between 100 and 400 seniors there for some portion of the varied schedule.

MRS. CONWAY WORRIES because there are so many more who would come if they had transportation. Those in Farmington have the special senior taxi service but seniors in the Hills are still lacking in expensive public transportation.

Rose Fevaris and Frances Deidin, both of whom live in the mobile home park, recall the grim days before they found people to drive them to "The Gathering Place."

Ms. Fevaris who lives with a daughter in college said: "It got to a point after my husband died a year ago that all I did was sit in a rocking chair and wither away." She explained that she can't work or drive because of a heart condition, but desperately wanted to make a life for herself and find new friends and interests.

Ms. Conway heard of the problem, called St. Clare at Our Lady of Sorrows

Catholic Church and through a "help your neighbor program," Sister arranged for Joan Dumas to take Ms. Fevaris and Ms. Deidin to the programs.

Once at the center, seniors Bea and John Payne agreed to pick them up and take them home.

Unless one of the Paynes is sick they attend "The Gathering Place" five days a week often with as many passengers as the car will hold.

Transportation is my biggest problem," Ms. Deidin said. "I never learned to drive and my son whom I live with isn't able to."

She likes to attend two days a week and said that before, the only time she got out was to go grocery shopping once a week, "but that didn't fill my time."

She and Ms. Fevaris were two of the 79 seniors who went in two buses to the Oktoberfest in Fowlerville this month.

Fortunately those in Karen Ross's ethnic dance class had pretty well mastered the polka by the time of the Fowlerville excursion and all agree that the dance floor got a good workout from the Farmington area seniors.

It meant a lot to these people to learn something like the polka and then go out and have fun with it," Ms. Ross said.

She is financed by a CETA grant and there is a dark fear that when the grant runs out "Miss Sunshine," as the seniors like to call her, will no longer be with them.

Another new, popular class that Ms. Ross initiated is the weekly Wednesday morning exercise class and much to the delight of the steadily increasing group, belly dancing has proved to be one of the most popular forms of exercise.

While Ms. Ross' special spark keeps the exercise and ethnic dancing rolling, the seniors are practically unanimous in their

feelings which Ms. Fevaris capsuled: "Loretta is mother hen to all of us."

Although Ms. Conway said she is constantly wrestling with unanswerable problems, "the book with all the answers has yet to be written," she commented. "My work is a joy. There's always an expression of love here—in fact, there's so much love, you wouldn't believe it."

BUT, LOVE, the great intangible, is an obvious presence among the seniors.

Ms. Fevaris said, "I have had such an injection of cheer from these people that this has become my second home."

Bea Payne said she likes to sit at the end of a table as she pees quilts. "That way if anybody wants to pull up a chair to tell me about their troubles, I'm easy to find."

Mary Lou Nellis, senior volunteer, sits by the door five days a week to make certain that no one who comes through is a stranger for more than the time it takes to hang up a coat.

Monica Romans who helps Ms. Conway with the organization of activities, is usually behind the counter when the buffet lunch is served.

"If someone is new, I try to take them to a table where one of our many goodwill ambassadors are seated. I make sure no one ever eats alone."

Weekly activities run from cards and coffee, library time and the exercise class mornings to bingo, travel films and craft classes in the afternoon.

A health nurse comes regularly to take blood pressure readings and answer questions and there are several day-long trips each month.

Many, like Marie Walker, wish the program could be expanded to more activities on weekends.

"I crawled in here about a year ago,"

Ms. Walker said. "I had lived in Farmington for 20 years and I have been a widow for seven. I didn't have any place to go. The weekends are the loneliest. I took a part time job in a bookstore to keep from climbing the walls."

She drives and says she always has a couple of passengers and would bring more if she could.

All who attend stress that far from everything they do is solely for themselves. Many have already begun to make Christmas gifts for retarded youngsters. Soon there will be lines of handmade mittens hanging in the large room. When Marian Oakland West opens, the seniors will be there to greet the new residents on a one-to-one basis.

Some are foster grandparents, others have special community projects they help with.

Ms. Conway said that as the program grows she hopes to enlist more help from the seniors, themselves, to take over certain positions of responsibility. Her efforts, however, are not limited to any particular generation.

She welcomes volunteers from the community at large. Right now, she said, one woman volunteer does all the bingo calling. Another voice would be helpful.

IF TRANSPORTATION is the number one problem for seniors, then housing is a very strong second.

Martha and Sam Turner spent time in their native Scotland this past summer. They liked the senior housing there.

"In the middle of a subdivision there will be a dozen cottages for seniors. They're right in there with everyone else. This is the "in" thing in Scotland. I wouldn't want to live in a highrise box. I'd like to have my own door to go in and out. That's important to me."

Seniors at the Grand River center agree that a mini-bus door-to-door would help to bring many lonely people into the fold. It would free those like Ms. Fevaris and Ms. Deidin who are dependent upon someone else for rides.

Although Ms. Conway is certain that the total potential has scarcely been tapped, for the hundreds who walk up the steps of the American Legion Hall each week, it is exactly what the name says—"The Gathering Place."

They liked the senior housing there.

Kendall enrolls in seminary

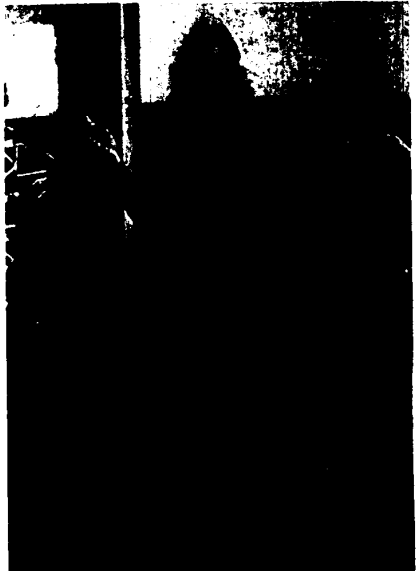
David Kendall, son of Mr. and Mrs. Walter B. Kendall of Farmington Hills, has enrolled in Auburn Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Ky. He is a 1976 graduate of Spring Arbor College, in Spring Arbor, Mich.

Actuary society names honoree

Theresa Braccialarghe, of Farmington Hills, has been named a fellow of the Society of Actuaries (FSA). She becomes one of about 2,300 fellows in the United States and Canada.

The Society names as fellows those who have successfully completed a series of 30 examinations on the mathematics of insurance and its specific applications to life insurance, health insurance, annuities and other private and governmental benefit plans.

The Society of Actuaries is an international professional organization which seeks to advance the scientific analysis of insurance.



With Greek music to back her up, Karen Rose starts some easy but fun ethnic dance steps with Farmington seniors. (Staff photo by Harry Mauthe)

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