

Needy! Poverty stalks wealthy suburbs

Poverty-stricken families aren't unique in suburbs like Farmington and Farmington Hills, where at least 2,453 people are considered poor.

"We fight the image of being an affluent society, but we know differently, because we know these people are out there," said Loretta Conway, Farmington Hills senior adult supervisor.

Individuals are considered at poverty level if they are between 15 and 64 years old and earn less than \$4,729 annually, or if they are 65 years old and earn less than \$4,359 a year, according to reports by the U.S. Census Bureau.

For almost one-half of Michigan's population over 65, annual incomes are not sufficient to cover the basic costs of food, clothing and shelter, according to data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Census data from 1980 shows that of 2,453 Farmington and Farmington Hills residents at the poverty level, 535 are 60 and older.

The area with the highest poverty level is Nine Mile between Middlebelt and Inkster roads, according to the census report.

Programs provided for senior adults such as home chore, general assistance, health services, nutritional meals, free legal aid and library services are offered to residents of both cities.

But funding from city, state and federal governments, as well as donations from churches and service clubs aren't sufficient to fill all the needs of the poor in the community, Conway said.

Though senior adults are the hardest pressed financially, the growing number of unemployed residents under 65 is also affected by the economy.

AS OF FEBRUARY 1983 there were an estimated 550 unemployed residents in a total work force of 4,900 in Farmington. This is an 11.2 percent unemployment rate.

During the same time period an estimated 9,700 Farmington Hills residents were unemployed in a 23,350 work force. This is a 13.7 percent unemployment rate.

A spokesman for the Labor Market of Information in Detroit reported a substantial increase in the unemployment rate during the past two years. In February 1981 Farmington had a 9.2 percent unemployment rate, and in Farmington Hills 11.4 percent of the residents were unemployed.

In December 1983 Farmington and Farmington Hills became involved in a statewide effort directed by former

Gov. William Milliken, who declared a state hunger emergency, to battle hunger in Michigan with food distribution centers.

The center at the Farmington Hills city hall accepts private and corporate money and food donations. The site has serviced approximately 245 families since its inception, with some families receiving more than one food package, according to Doug Gaynor, Farmington Hills director of special services.

The type of food in the packages depends on the needs and size of the family, Gaynor said. "We're giving a great deal of baby food."

Many of the people asking for food donations are unemployed.

"Some of these people may have made \$75,000 a year or they could have made \$25,000 annually, and are suddenly unemployed," Gaynor said. "There's a good mix of longtime date people and newly unemployed asking for help."

"For a person to come in and ask for food, you've got to be in a tough situation," Gaynor said. "I find it difficult to believe there's a large number of people that could walk in and say they need it, and don't. Recipients are asked to show proof of need,

like an unemployment check, he said.

EVEN THOUGH the food centers are picking up some of the slack, the Salvation Army on Shawwassee in Farmington Hills has declared a 300 percent increase in the number of people seeking help, director John Crampton said.

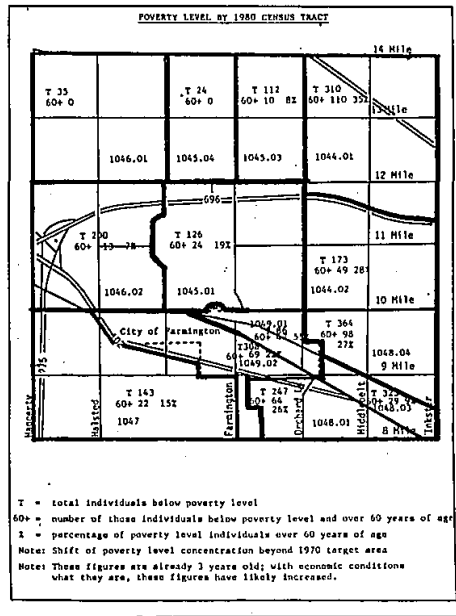
Crampton conducts a counseling session with the people to determine the degree of need.

"Some of the people, especially the new poor, don't know what's available to them," Crampton said. "We help set up a budget so they can manage their money better, and we are a church so we also give spiritual counseling."

Much of the increase in the Salvation Army's aid is sought by the "new poor" which Crampton defined as people who have worked for years and who were recently laid off.

The average person seeking help is 35 to 40 years old, buying a home, worked for one of the automobile companies and has two or three children, Crampton said.

"A lot of people have exhausted their resources, and I don't see anything on the horizon that things are going to get better," Crampton said.



Tax hike expected in July

Farmington residents will face an almost one-mill hike in local taxes if city officials adopt a proposed \$4.8-million 1983-84 budget.

Faced with a projected 6-percent increase in next year's operating costs as well as an approximately 2-percent drop in state equalized value (SEV) of property, Farmington City Manager Robert Desmond is recommending an overall .955-mill (per \$1,000 of assessed value) increase. That would raise the current 10.785 mills to 11.74 mills in 1983-84.

So if you own a \$50,000 home assessed at \$25,000, your city taxes in 1983-84 would run approximately \$293 under the proposed millage increase.

Although the tax hike appears likely in light of the projected increased costs of doing business and a drop in local tax revenues, Desmond said that city officials have been able to maintain a fairly stable tax rate since the late 1970s — between 10 and 12 mills — because property assessments in Farmington have increased. The recommended millage rate for 1983-84 is still lower than the 11.9 mills levied in 1979-80, he added.

But times have changed this year with the almost 3-percent drop in "communitywide" assessed value and an average 4-percent drop in residential property, Desmond said.

"In our particular case, we determined we could lower assessed values



Tell me your troubles
Sheila Barduca, a bartender at O'Sheehans in Farmington Hills, lends an ear to customers. Some Farmington area barkeeps share the conversations they hear in a story on Page 3A.

In 3 suburbs Police dispatch studied

Farmington, Farmington Hills and West Bloomfield residents will be calling the same phone number in cases of emergency if officials decide it's financially worthwhile to combine the three communities' police and fire dispatch services.

"It would be a more efficient use of our resources," said Farmington Director of Public Safety Robert Siefert. "It just might be a better way of doing business."

About a year ago, after Farmington Hills police asked City Council members about establishing E-911 — an emergency response system that's more sophisticated than the traditional 911 — representatives from each of the three communities' fire and police de-

partments as well as an Oakland County representative, formed a committee to study the possibility of consolidating the police and fire dispatch systems.

Although the E-911 system is still unavailable through Michigan Bell Telephone Co. and costs right now appear prohibitive, "we had prior discussions between the three communities about cooperative services anyway," Siefert said.

Feminist wants nukes nixed now

Farmington resident Marian McCracken expected the East Berthles to be "miserable and unhappy" but found out otherwise on a recent trip behind the Iron Curtain.

McCracken made her journey to East Berlin after participating in a demonstration in favor of a nuclear freeze at NATO headquarters in Brussels, Belgium. She is a member of the National Organization for Women and last spring joined the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom's STAR (Stop The Arms Race) program — a campaign to promote a nuclear arms freeze.



Marian McCracken

"I've come to the conclusion that stopping this madness is the number one priority," said McCracken, who also joined the international league because "nuclear war is insane and I'm a feminist and it's a feminist group."

Although the women's organization, men joined the more than 10,000 people gathered at NATO's headquarters in Brussels, where STAR campaigners presented NATO officials with petitions boasting signatures protesting nuclear arms and war, McCracken said.

"American were not positive," McCracken said, referring to American NATO officials who received a petition buttressed with American citizens' signatures.

ON INTERNATIONAL Women's Day (March 3), the some 10,000 protesters marched past NATO headquarters protesting nuclear arms and war, she said.

"I've been in a lot of demonstrations and there wasn't any one in this one who was hostile toward us," McCracken said.

Impressed that 125 Americans turned out to join in the demonstration, McCracken said the American peace delegation wanted to show Europeans "that in the United States, the majority of people favor a nuclear freeze."

"We did bring all the evidence of what's happening in the U.S.," McCracken said. "We want to reassure them that the majority of the people in this country do want a freeze. The Europeans know what war is like, we don't."

"But the hawks in NATO are telling us to back off," she said, angry that NATO officials have not sponsored peace talks since 1978. "This is the problem. Why hasn't there been a discussion?"

"We (the peace league) are active politically and we're putting pressure on the government," McCracken said.

McCracken left the demonstration feeling that progress would be slow but that eventually a nuclear arms process will become reality.

Following the demonstration, McCracken was invited to East Berlin as a guest of the German Democratic

Republic (East Germany) Peace Council.

DESPITE WAKING up on her first morning in East Berlin to a soldier shouting "Achtung, Achtung" — reminiscent of many World War II movies she had watched — McCracken said the two-day visit changed many of her ideas about East Germany.

"We don't know anything about East Germany. We really don't," she said. "They are not unhappy and miserable, which I had expected."

Instead, McCracken found East Germans heavily involved in building residences and strengthening an educational system that she says outlines the American public system.

"It's obvious that after housing, education is a priority," McCracken said, indicating that the quality and toughness of the students' schoolwork exceeds that of American students.

Class size, she said, is about one teacher for every 15 students. In the morning, students are involved in required courses such as Russian. In the afternoon, students are bused to one of five Palace of the Pioneers where children take specialized classes such as theater, engineering or art. All students, however, are required to take methodology courses in communism, she said.

After spending almost a night talking with an East Berlin teacher about the differences between communism and the American way of life, McCracken said there was little way to change each other's mind or convince the other of faults in either system.

Although chalking up her visit as a good experience, McCracken said she was happy to return to West Berlin — away from the wall that separates two ways of life.

"The wall is just accepted," she said. "Both sides agree it has to be there."

But the lack of people on East Berlin streets during lunch time and the absence of beigns and roses convinced McCracken that despite the housing bungs and fine education system, East Germans live in a controlled society.

oral quarrel

What should be done to help out the poor?

Census figures indicate that poverty in the suburbs is on the increase — a chief reason being the growing number of senior citizens who live in them. Two communities like Farmington and Farmington Hills are feeling the impact of the unemployment figures and an aging population.

President Reagan suggests that volunteerism is the answer in aiding those in need.

Today's Oral Quarrel question is:

WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE SHOULD BE DONE TO AID THE IMPROVERISHED IN THE SUBURBS?

To answer Oral Quarrel call us at 477-5498. You will have until 1 p.m. on Friday to reply. Look in Monday's edition of the Farmington Observer to see how your neighbors feel about this issue.

what's inside

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