

# Reforms promised for Plymouth Center

By MICHAEL MATUSZEWSKI  
Will the abuse stop?

"It's a good first step," said Alice Sauls, president of the Plymouth Association of Retarded Citizens, following U.S. District Court Judge William Joiner's preliminary injunction last week.

According to attorneys for the Plymouth Association and the parents themselves, the steps that will be taken in the next six months will help to put an end to the alleged abuse and upgrade the care of the 875 residents of the Plymouth Center for Human Development.

The district court order means:

- Hiring of at least 60 new attendants during the next six months.
- Establishment of an independent "monitoring committee" in the next several weeks.
- Establishment of a new system at the Plymouth Center under which each attendant will be held accountable for the care and well being of between four and eight residents.
- Separation of aggressive residents from the more passive and defenseless residents.
- Better training for new employees.

"THESE ARE some measures immediately protecting the resident from harm," said William Campbell, chief attorney for the Michigan Association for Retarded Citizens (MARC) and the Plymouth Association.

"Later we'll concentrate on getting more staff, more doctors, more psychiatrists," he said. Judge Joiner's order is the first significant movement in a case originally filed nearly two years ago. Since the originally filed hearing have been a number of state-sponsored committees and studies, but no concrete action has been taken.

"There was a lot of bickering between the Michigan Department of Mental Health and the Department of Social Services," said Dan Ostrowski, one of several MARC representatives who sat in on the hearing.

"There was a lot of finger-pointing, a lot of confusion, as to certain guidelines."

"Judge Joiner's order also addressed this problem. He called for more formalized cooperation between the two state-level agencies."

According to the MARC representatives, this action would go a long way in expediting investigations of complaints of abuse at the Plymouth Center.

MANY OF the parents of children housed at the Plymouth Center nodded their heads in approval as each of the points of the judicial order was ticked off and explained.

"For them," said another MARC representative, "it's been a long battle. This is the first sign of progress they've had."

Mrs. Sauls said Judge Joiner's order does not mean an end to the battle.

## Travel up, gas use down

Although Americans drove four per cent more miles in 1977 than in 1976, only 2.4 per cent more gasoline was consumed, according to an analysis by the Highway Users Federation.

The Federation based its findings on 1977 statistics of highway travel, compiled by the Federal Highway Administration and the American Petroleum Institute.

The federation estimates that in 1977, 58 billion more highway miles were driven than in 1976. At the same time, average gasoline consumption increased about 170,000 barrels per day (a barrel contains 42 gallons).

The nation's use of all petroleum products was

up five per cent in 1977, with gasoline registering the smallest increase at less than half that. The use of petroleum products other than gasoline was up 6.4 per cent. Use of residual fuel oil—a heavy oil used for firing boilers in plants and ships—was up the largest increase of all petroleum products at 8.8 per cent.

Jet fuel use was up about four per cent, and distillate fuel—used for home and commercial heating and diesel engines—was up by 5.5 per cent.

Woodrow W. Rankin, director of the Federation's Transportation and Safety Division made the analysis.

"We're going to keep watch and we're going to expect action kind of quick," she said.

"I'd like to see improvement right tomorrow morning," she added half-jokingly.

The order is a far-ranging one. It goes as far as giving the parents' groups and the rest of the community a voice in planning the effort to upgrade the center's services.

Judge Joiner's order also includes the entire plan of action outlined by Gov. William Milliken last week.

Conceivably any slippage or tardiness in implementing Gov. Milliken's plan could now be brought before Judge Joiner.

The ordered increase in staff size and the establishment of a special independent monitoring com-

mittee go the farthest in affecting the day-to-day operation of the Plymouth Center.

Judge Joiner's action will force the center to assign one attendant to every four residents during day shifts at Binet, Molloy, Kennedy and Sullivan halls.

Most the unexplained cases of abuse have occurred in these halls.

During the night shift, every attendant will be in charge of no more than eight residents.

Moreover, the order requires that the attendants be on duty in the wards. Previously, the hospital had complied with HEW requirement, which said the hospital must have one staff member for every eight residents.

IN ACTUALITY, attorneys explained, the Plymouth Center was operating with a "paper staff." On paper, they said, the center met the regulations. In reality, it was severely understaffed. It was very rare, they said, for the center to have a full staff of attendants on duty.

The other major provision, the monitoring committee, is expected to begin working within two weeks.

The committee will be made up of four people, selected by MARC, the Plymouth Association, and the department of Mental Health. It will have free reign to make unannounced spot checks of any of the Plymouth Center's facilities at any time.

It will report its findings to Judge Joiner every 30 days.

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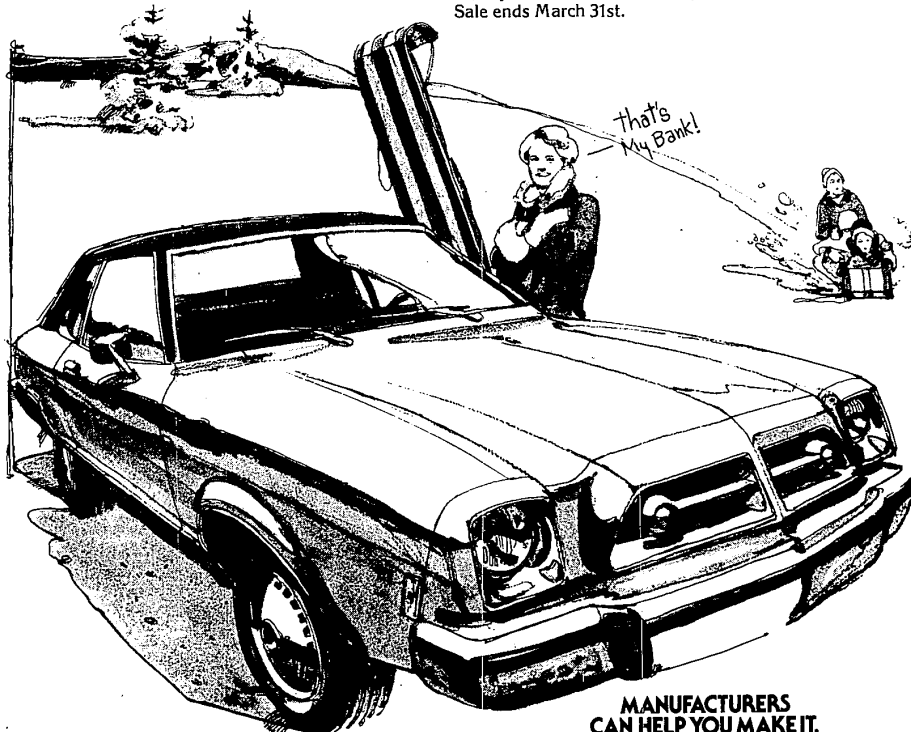
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