Mid-life rebirth

Struggling to cope with rusty tools, sapped courage

By SHEILA McCARTHY DUNNELLS

September, for many women, re-gardless of the fiscal time-clock, marks the official beginning of a new year. It's really very simple. When school starts a new year begins. In mid-life, when schools swallow up

the last, youngest child, there is fre-quently a re-birth for the mother. She aces a new year and a change in her ife. No one is depending on her any-

more
The renaissance often begins with the question "What will I do when the children grow up?"
Many women find there is no answer to this question. Instead of the euphoria they expected to feel at the moment of freedom, there is panie.

Too many women feel that they have spent all those years doing nothing more marketable than baking brownies nothing more supervisory than running a car pool. In short, they have talent, but their skills are rusty, their francase is eanned.

it is a lonely time. Much has been written about this time in a woman's life. Some authors call it the 'empty nest syndrome'. Gail Sheehy dealt with it in 'Passages'.

A group of women in Birmingham have acted upon the special need women at this time in their lives. To help women, of any age, who want to change directions, the Birmingham Community Women's Center; was conceived.

IN THE PLEASANT and relaxed at-IN THE PLEASANT and relaxed at-mosphere of the Women's Center, lo-cated in the former Barnum School on Purdy St., Colleen Heimstadt, a coun-selor at the center, spoke of the women who seek out the center's support groups and the needs that bring them. While support groups appeal to many types of women, there is evidence the basic desire is the same, to change the direction in their lives, she explained.

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For many, paralyzed by insecurities,

volunteer work, or said "yes" to one too many community jobs that were dull or unfulfilling. She now wants a broader dimension in her life. A less happy group is the large num-ber of women who are married to mer-



There are dozens of reasons for the feelings of discontent, hopeless-ness, and restlessness that many women feel just when they expect to experience eighoria at the moment of freedom. Helping them stand up during the crisis is an important topic at the center.

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who are threatened by an involvment on her part outside the home. Unfortunately, surmised Ms. Heimstadt, for inancial reasons she will not leave the marriage. Counseling is out of the question. It is, she said, for them a dead-end situation. The marriage is stagaant and outlet, a safe place to talk.

"For all these women," she said, "the Center is a safe place to go and talk about their feelings. Here she can, in confidentiality, explore her options with other women who will be supportive of how she is feeling."

Ms. Heimstadt holds an M A in Adult Counseling. At the center she directs one of the support groups. "It is not

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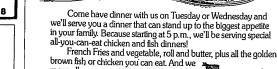
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