

# Senior housing creates underclass

By CRAIG PIECHURA

Homeowner groups fighting construction of senior citizen high-rises have an unlikely ally in Gray Panther founder Maggie Kuhn of Philadelphia. "We're creating a permanent underclass of people who are isolated, powerless and poor with federal money and federal programs," Ms. Kuhn said. In Southfield Saturday at a University of Michigan-Eastern Institute conference on aging, the activist for the aged called for a "10-year moratorium on senior housing."

She also wants state and federal money spent for house renovation and neighborhood rehabilitation, rather than for building senior citizen housing. Ms. Kuhn, who makes a point of telling people she is "73, going on 74," said senior housing complexes and retirement communities like Sun City, Ariz., are ghettos for the aged. "I spent two horrendous days in Sun City a few years ago when another conference was held there," she said. "It's a terrible place where no young people can live, they can only visit, and

there isn't a cigarette butt or gum wrapper on the entire grounds.

"I CAME home and had to pick up half a dozen beer bottles from my front lawn. I was delighted." Senior citizen activity centers came in for heavy criticism from Ms. Kuhn, too. She said too many program directors believe older's time should be spent playing bingo or making crafts with discarded egg cartons. "They assume we're little babies who want to play, that's all we want. So we throw away our lives and throw away a lifetime of skills."

"Every senior citizen center could be a staging area for a food co-op, or a housing cooperative." Home for Ms. Kuhn is a refurbished old house in Philadelphia. She shares the house with three people, 25, 31 and 36, three cats and 100 plants.

When she says that her hope for the future lies with "families of choice" who live with, learn from, and work with people of all ages, she backs up that conviction with personal experience.

"I like the family definition of the American Home Economics Association that defines a family as 'Two or more persons who share recognized goals, lifestyles and decision-making over a time,'" Ms. Kuhn said. "The group one comes home to is a family of choice. In the unit there is a network of commitment and responsibility."

"Of course, everything I am telling you violates every housing code in America."

CATCHY SLOGANS such as "Senior Power" aren't chanted by the Gray Panthers, said Ms. Kuhn. She said it is "demonic" to believe that seniors acting alone can affect social change. "We don't want to pit various groups against each other to gain special privileges for us," Ms. Kuhn said. "We want to help the tribe survive, and we are the elders of the tribe. Age is a unifying force — the youngest person is getting old."

"Age is the one thing that can bring us together. We're all getting old, so we must as well accept it and enjoy it."



MAGGIE KUHN

But Ms. Kuhn sees the three generations ("generations of learning, earning and yearning") becoming more isolated because of economic competition and mandatory retirement laws.

For that reason, she said she believes old people must find a "staging area" to meet people and form "a network of commitment and responsibility."

In her own life, Ms. Kuhn said she met the people in her extended family through the Gray Panthers organization and through her former work with the United Presbyterian Office of Church and Society. A church or a synagogue could be a staging area for a lonely person of whatever age, she said.

One encouraging sign, said Ms. Kuhn, is that public school systems are opening the doors to people of all ages with continuing education programs. People can get together with friends they meet at school, she said. Also, empty school or college dormitories could be converted into apartments for anyone.

THE SEGMENT of society most resistant to change, Ms. Kuhn said, is business and industry. But the workplace is the most logical place to form ties, she said.

# Mrs. Dolan nixes filing charges in dowsing incident

Farmington Hills Councilwoman Jan Dolan has announced she will not file charges against George Majors, Jr. for throwing water in her face. Majors is the son of former City Manager George Majors. The senior Majors was forced to resign his position last August after conflicts with the city council. Mrs. Dolan was mayor at the time of Majors' termination. The water throwing incident occurred on Dec. 4 at the Roman Terrace restaurant where the junior Majors was employed. Majors admitted to throwing water.

report with the city juvenile department and requested the file remain suppressed in hopes the incident could be resolved "quietly." "My concern was, and still is, that this boy receive help in learning to deal with his emotions. I hoped this could be achieved without notoriety," she said. But earlier this year, Pete Waldmeir of the Detroit News wrote a column about the incident. Since that time, Mrs. Dolan has become convinced that a letter of apology won't be forthcoming and that pursuing the incident further would be useless. "As the mother of four sons, I can appreciate and commend the boy for his loyalty to his family," she said. "I will defend his and any resident's right to disagree with me or any member of a city council, school board or any other elective body, but disagreeing doesn't give one the right to be physically abusive."

Mrs. Dolan says she had asked the senior Majors to meet to discuss the problem, but he refused.

After the incident, Mrs. Dolan filed a

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