

Trip dedicated to feeding refugees

By MARY CONNELLY-SZCZESNY

In these difficult economic times you may be worried about feeding yourself and your family.

Imagine three persons worried about feeding thousands.

Sheila Sloan of Bloomfield Village is one of three persons spearheading the job of funneling food to thousands of refugees in Southeast Asia from Michigan.

It is her job to drum up money and volunteer workers, to decide how the money will be spent and to make people aware that each day thousands of people are starving.

"There may be no cure for cancer but there is a cure for starvation. It's food."

"I think each one of us should sit down and think about the fact there is an answer and we can help. We can't do anything about the politics but in this we can help," said Mrs. Sloan.

MRS. SLOAN, Elinor Holbrook of East Lansing and James W. Jordan Jr. of Detroit comprise the three-person committee heading the Michigan Refugee Relief Fund, begun last November at the request of Governor Milliken.

From corporate coffers to the pockets of elementary school youngsters, they are trying to raise money to feed the refugees.

Sheila Sloan does not quote the figures prepared by the relief fund. Those figures estimate that 400,000 Cambodians are living in Thai refugee camps; that 70,000 other refugees also inhabit the camps; that 600,000 refugees can be

found along the Thailand/Cambodia border; that 13,000 orphaned children need help in Thailand; in short, that nearly 50 percent of Cambodia's population has died or starved due to war and famine.

Instead, she says simply, "This is something on the order of the holocaust or the plague. It's genocide."

"Do people want to tell their grandchildren they could have sent five or \$10 but instead they let these people die?"

JORDAN, THE governor's executive assistant, said Mrs. Sloan was tapped for the appointment because she has been active in community affairs and is experienced in fund-raising techniques.

She has worked for New Detroit Inc., a foundation for the Meadow Brook Art Gallery at Oakland University, is on the board of directors of the American Jewish Committee and several Jewish organizations.

Jordan, who accompanied Milliken on a trip to the refugee camps, said the Michigan relief fund is being used by President and Mrs. Carter as a model for other states organizing aid.

Money is raised by appealing to volunteer groups, churches, universities, clubs, businesses, public and private schools and community leaders.

For example, Jordan has spoken and shown slides of the refugee camps to a group at Groves High School and has been asked to speak before the entire student body.

"Some schools have even indicated they might give a gift to the fund to buy

life for a child rather than a senior class gift," Mrs. Sloan said.

"We're not asking for large amounts."

"As we look through the fund we see people from all walks of life giving money. The people who know hardship and pain first hand are the first to give," she added.

MRS. SLOAN rejects questions about some of the food and supplies not reaching the refugees.

"We have to lay that aside," she maintained. "We don't have the luxury of waiting to see if each and every dollar reaches each and every person."

"The dollars have to go and have to go now. We have to work with fervor before more damage is done. We already know children will have brain damage and nose disease."

"We know so many children are orphaned. If we don't help, what hope have they?" she said.

Jordan said reports from volunteers working in the camps indicate that the majority of food and medical supplies are getting through.

To date, the Michigan Refugee Relief Fund has raised \$46,000.

"It's a small amount but it's a beginning," Jordan said.

Jordan said he will "never forget the sights and sounds of death" which pervaded the refugee camps.

His photographs reveal the agony of a mother watching her child die from lack of food; the suffering of a dying child clinging to his only toy — a

tattered piece of plastic; the torment on the faces of those longing for a ration of fish or rice.

The famine in Cambodia is expected to continue until the end of the year. Jordan said the December rice harvest fell 80 percent below normal levels and there are reports of starving farmers eating seed rice.

CURRENTLY, Mrs. Sloan is tilling the rich soil of the Birmingham-Bloomfield volunteer network in her relief campaign.

The relief fund is relying on volunteers and has no paid fund-raising staff.

"What we're hoping is that we can find people and leaders in various organizations who will help us," she said. "We hope they will lend us people for phoning, typing and that type of work."

"We need so many people and we need to take advantage of people with organizations."

"We don't have an organization or a paid executive doing this full time so we desperately need people who have an organization and who know the ropes."

Donations of time have also been sought from businesses.

For example, the Barkley and Evergreen Advertising Agency of Southfield is preparing public service commercials in which the Millikens appeal for aid.

Those wishing to make donations can send money to the Michigan Refugee Relief Fund, Box 55-316A, Detroit 48255.

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