

Monday, January 18, 1992

# Welcome Group formed to greet newcomers to the Gathering Place

By Loraine McClish  
staff writer

Four women, regulars at the Gathering Place, have formed the Welcome Group to greet newcomers to the area's senior center.

"With so many of us here now, it is a bit overwhelming for some one who has never been here before," said Gwen Satz, who is the mainstay of the four-some. The other members are Florence Viergutz, Virginia Flock and Celia Chapman.

"This is one big room to enter," she said. "Many of us are busy doing our own thing, and there must be 50-60 activities on the calendar at any one time."

"I began to notice that there got to be just too many people standing at the door wondering where they were going to fit in."

Since the Welcome Group was formed, the four members estimate they've been able to greet, put at ease,

and integrate about four to five newcomers a day. Those newcomers may have otherwise been intimidated by the Gathering Place's size, she said.

WHEN THE Gathering Place came into being under the sponsorship of Farmington Hills Parks and Recreation Department seven years ago, it had a staff of three and an attendance that averaged 16 a day.

Today, it still has a staff of three with an attendance that can reach 200 a day.

"We were always concerned about the newcomers," said Loretta Conway, who has been director of senior activities since the center's inception.

"We always knew the personal contact was important, and we were all well aware that this might be slipping away from us."

The Gathering Place's regular hours are 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. weekdays, but it has an outreach program and a home chore program. Mrs. Conway has al-

ways taken pride that no matter how many seniors used the services it offered, the staff knew those people by name.

IN HER words, "If someone didn't show up, we could pretty well guess whose basement might be flooding or whose arthritis might be acting up."

"We were afraid we were going to lose that intimacy when we discovered that the answer to our dilemma was right in front of us."

The answer right in front of the staff was the number of seniors who had completed the Personal Growth for Older Adults course, brought to the Gathering Place by Continuum Center at Oakland University.

"WE LEARNED how to listen. It's a simple as that," Mrs. Satz said. "It's amazing how little talking I do. I don't rattle off the dozen or so activities that are going on or put a paint brush or a bingo card in their hand."

"I just listen. Once in less than 15 minutes I had a good idea of what a woman would like to do here. And I was right."

Mrs. Satz worked for 31 years before her retirement in a job "where people came to me. I didn't go to them," she said.

"When I think about it now, I know I was retarded socially. You can get retarded socially being a housewife, too, so I know how hard it must be for some of those who are here for the first time."

"I visited three senior centers before I found this one and someone bothered to go out of their way to make me welcome."

Mrs. Satz now juggles her welcome job between current events classes, a humanities class, oil painting instructions, swimming, and for a while during the fall, rehearsing for the senior's musical production.

She has also "signed up for every class offered through the Continuum Center," she said, and acts as a liaison

"between the Gathering Place and Oakland University to keep tabs on what they're doing over there."

MRS. CONWAY called Mrs. Satz's use of the communications skills she learned in Personal Growth for Older Adults a natural outcome of some of the courses the Gathering Place offers.

"Many of them work for seniors to make support groups for seniors," Mrs. Conway said. "And one (course) will spur you on to take another."

She spoke of "Making the Rest of Your Life the Best of Your Life" and "Growing Older Bolder" as two other courses that have brought benefit to both the individual as well as to the group as a whole.

"They don't let us get rusty," is the way Mrs. Satz put it.

"We all feel better about ourselves, have more self esteem, are more comfortable and have been taught that some of those things we did at 18 we can still do now."

If Mrs. Satz has a problem at all with the Gathering Place's calendar, it is with the large number of activities offered.

"I LEARNED early to prioritize," she said.

All regular classes, activities and special events for the month are listed in the "Senior Messenger," the group's newsletter. The newsletter can be picked up without charge in the Gathering Place.

The senior adult facilities are in Mercy Center, on 11 Mile, east of Middlebelt through Gate 4.

The seniors use one large multi-purpose room and have the use of the center's gym and swimming pool.

The Gathering Place now gathers 70 seniors every day to partake in its exercise classes, the largest number Mrs. Conway is aware of in the metropolitan area.

## Free assistance given seniors on tax returns

The Tax-Aide program, administered here by members of the Farmington Hills chapter of the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), gets under way Jan. 19 and runs through April 12.

The program gives free assistance to seniors and retirees in preparing their

1981 income tax returns for the federal and state governments.

Ivar Nylin, a member of the local chapter of AARP, initiated the program for this area seven years ago. He is now district coordinator for the program in Michigan and expects to reach

about 9,000 seniors throughout the state this year.

Volunteers obtain the rating of counselor in the program by attending four days of training in filling out tax forms, being tested by IRS agents, then getting another day of training by a representative from the Michigan Treasury Department.

A total of 28 counselors will be working in the Gathering Place and Farmington Branch Library to aid seniors here.

Hours for those attending the Gathering Place are from 10:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Tuesdays, beginning Jan. 19, and Thursdays, Jan. 28, Feb. 11, March 11, March 25 and April 8.

Hours for those attending Farmington Branch Library are from noon to 3 p.m. on Fridays, beginning Jan. 22, through April 2.

The Gathering Place is located in Mercy Center, on 11 Mile Road, east of Middlebelt through Gate 4.

Farmington Branch Library is located on State and Liberty streets in downtown Farmington.

Reservations are not required. However, people wishing the service are asked to bring their W-2 and 1099 statements for income, pension, interest and dividends, total Social Security received in 1981; 1981 real estate tax receipts; total rent paid in 1981 with name and address to whom it was paid; and a copy of their 1980 income tax returns.

Norman Berry will take telephone inquiries at 478-0811.

## Series for women begins Jan. 28

"We Live between Memory and Hope as Women in the 80s" is a four-part series of lectures that begins in Our Lady of Sorrows Catholic Church on Thursdays, beginning Jan. 28.

The sessions will run from 10:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. in the church at 23615 Power Road, between Orchard Lake and Farmington roads. It is brought to this area by three sisters in pastoral ministry and one whose forte is Biblical theology.

"There are pockets of women throughout the world who are questioning their faith," said Sr. Mary Fran Gilleran, speaking for the four-some that developed the series.

"This is an outreach for the women who are feeling lost and alone through the effects of the women's movement; women who are having to rethink their church and their faith through the women's movement that gave us a whole new language," she said.

She said she and her co-workers for the series are all involved in adult religious education, but their work has turned to a personal interest in women and how they are coping with their new liberation.

SR. MARY FRAN sets the tone for the series with her talk called "How

Did We Get here: Our Age is a New Age."

This is followed on Feb. 25 with "How Do We Handle Today," led by Sr. Donna Hart.

"Who Shows us," set for March 25 is led by Sr. Juliana Casey, and "How Are We Doing?" winds up the series on April 29.

Registration can be made by sending a check in the amount of \$20, made payable to Sisters IHM Series, with a stamped self-addressed envelope to: Sisters IHM Series, 2735 Poland, Hamtramck 48212.

Those without a series ticket will be charged \$6 at the door.

## Gerry the Fool is both clown and therapist

Gerry Dziubinski, sometimes known as Gerry the Fool, returns to the area to teach clowning and pantomime to youngsters enrolled in Farmington Hills Parks and Recreation after-school classes.

His professional name belies the psychological and theatrical skills he uses in his work as mime, actor, storyteller, teacher and counselor, most notably in mental health clinics.

He'll be teaching youth clowning and pantomime on Wednesdays, beginning Jan. 20 in Forest Elementary School and on Thursdays beginning Jan. 21 in Shawasssee Elementary School. The classes include instruction in theater techniques, juggling, costume design and make-up.

A graduate of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the man who calls himself a fool has a background that ranges from study in Gestalt therapy and bioenergetics through drama, ballet and voice.

His work in the Detroit area has ranged from staff counselor in a drug abuse clinic to founding the Detroit Free School Fantasy Theatre, and most recently founding the Experiential Performing Arts Association.

He is now head of the mime department of Rosa Park Community Center where his "Gerry the Fool Group" is in residence,

"I WORK with the arts of mime," he says, "clowning, storytelling, music, foolery and experimental theater. I combine ancient elements of the fool and storyteller with my ideas and conceptions of folly, theater and therapy."

"I do experiential workshops in various aspects of my art. Workshops and performances are geared toward each particular audience."

As a performer he is skillful in drawing his audience into collaborating with him to create the performance.

As a teacher and counselor he uses improvisation to help the institutionalized in expressing their feelings, freeing their movements and increasing their self-confidence.

The essence of it all is communication, he says.

Though his work has been mostly in Michigan, several summers have been spent traveling across the U.S. and Canada.

He has received a host of grants for tours, therapeutic workshops and performances from Detroit Council for the Arts and Michigan Council for the Arts.

Registrations are being taken now for Gerry the Fool's after-school classes in Farmington Hills Parks and Recreation Department, in Farmington Hills City Hall complex on 11 Mile and Orchard Lake Roads. Fee is \$10 for the six-session course.



Sen. Doug Ross



Rep. Sandy Brotherton

## Ross, Brotherton, join in 'Money Talks' series

The Farmington Branch of American Association of University Women (AAUW) will host state Sen. Doug Ross, D-Southfield, and state Rep. Sandy Brotherton, R-Farmington, in a continuation of the group's current study, "Money Talks."

The two will give information and answer questions concerning the financial outlook for the state at 8:15 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 20, in Farmington Hills Branch Library, on 12 Mile Road, east of Farmington Road.

AAUW's business meeting will begin at 7:45 p.m.

Sen. Ross is now vice chairman of the state finance committee and Rep. Brotherton is vice chairman of the economic development and energy committee.

The two will also talk about new and pending legislation, and tell of future developments that are likely to affect Michigan residents and taxpayers.

The program is open to all area residents at no charge.

## Chorus hosts open house

Farmington Area Community Chorus launches its spring season with open house rehearsals at 7:30 p.m. Tuesdays, Jan. 19, 26 and Feb. 4 in its new rehearsal hall in North Farmington High School.

Chorus members are expecting to greet high-school students and adults who are interested in learning the workings of their group and hear some of their music.

The community chorus outgrew its previous rehearsal hall in Shawasssee Recreation Center and moved to larger quarters to accommodate more area residents who like to sing.

"Music reading ability or experience in choral singing is helpful but not necessary," said Sara Woollard speaking for the group.

"We're looking for people who enjoy singing and having fun while they're doing it."

There are no auditions.

The Tuesday evening rehearsals that begin this month lead up to dress rehearsal, then a spring concert in May. There are three concerts scheduled for each season, sponsored by Farmington Hills Parks and Recreation Department. The chorus is under the direction of Jim Whitten.

Registration fee of \$18 is required each season which includes sheet music. The fee is payable with registration at any of the next three open house rehearsals.



Gerry the Fool, founder of Detroit Free School Fantasy Theater and Experiential Performing Arts Association, teaches youngsters the art of clowning and pantomime in after-school classes this winter.