

Legal aid services feel pinch

Harry Klein's job is anything but "9 to 5" these days. He has been working 11-hour days as long as he can remember.

Klein is one of three attorneys that work at the Torch Drive-supported Legal Aid and Defender Association of Detroit, an agency which provides legal counseling free of charge to those who could not otherwise afford it.

Recently the agency has been handling up to 300 new cases a month, a large percentage of these being child and spouse abuse cases.

Said Klein, "We read in the paper about how the economy is on the upswing. But I'm seeing as many clients as ever who are suffering from the stress of long-term unemployment and economic problems."

Klein's statement is echoed by others in the business of helping those in need. While there is evidence of economic improvement many have yet to see a decrease in the number of people com-

ing to them for help.

Instead caseloads at many UP charities remain at extremely high levels.

Those people who had little to begin with feel the greatest impact of a recession. It is unfortunately these same people who are the last to benefit from economic improvement.

In recent years, a large number of Detroit area workers have lost their jobs and many may be permanently displaced from their former occupations.

Because of this, unemployment levels — and the needs created by unemployment — are expected to remain high for some time.

Virgil Carr, executive director of Family Service of Detroit and Wayne County, said the agency is presently handling more cases than ever.

Carr points out that "although unemployment levels have improved nationally, levels here in Detroit are still extremely high."

The services in highest demand, said Carr, are family counseling, child and spouse abuse prevention and alcohol and drug abuse assistance, problems that often result from a troubled economy.

Phones have been ringing frequently at Community Information Service (CIS), a Torch Drive-funded referral program for those who need assistance. CIS Director Evelyn Fraser said that recently there were more than 6,000 calls over a nine-day period from peo-

ple needing food, emergency shelter or help with utility bills.

"We haven't seen any let-up in the number of people who desperately need help," said Fraser. "There are still people calling us who have been unemployed for two or three years. More are running out of unemployment benefits every day."

While costs for providing services have been going up, fewer dollars are available to meet them. Many UP charities have had to reduce staff and close offices to cut costs.



m.m. memos

Margaret Miller

The sea has its way

We've been watching for the past few months an interesting battle between man and the sea. Man is belatedly getting in his life, but the sea will win, one way or another.

Our house is on Siesta Key, one of the barrier islands along Florida's Gulf Coast. A small piece of water called Midnight Pass separates us from Casey Key, just south. We like to walk the mile down the beach to the pass, and in the years we've been coming here we've noticed with interest the ever-changing contours of sand and sea.

The pass has changed often from wide and calm to swift and narrow, and then back again. Walking around the tip of the key to the bay, we have seen many inlets and sand spits form and then disappear again.

BUT THIS SPRING something different was happening. The pass, which had been marked by relatively minor variations before, was changing course. The water was cutting through to the gulf a mile farther north. Siesta Key was growing short and Casey Key long.

It bothered us and other beach strollers far more than owners of two large, expensive homes built near the end of the key. The sea was cutting away their property.

Any attempt to change the way of the waters requires official approval here, so about the time their backyards had been reduced to half size, the two owners went before the county commission.

They wanted permission to place sandbags to try to slow the undercutting. They were turned down, and it was pointed out that those who build in such exposed spots must take their chances with the elements.

AND THE SEA kept coming and was getting dangerously close to the swimming pool behind the home farthest south. The two owners went back to the commission. This time one vote was changed. Approval was granted, providing permission was given by all other property owners at the south end of the key.

One owner refused. She explained she had purchased her land, between the two tracts with big homes, from one of the men involved. She said she learned later that a deed restriction kept her from building on it.

Weeks went on. The sea kept taking its bites and lawyers tried to resolve the human conflict. Finally a promise to remove deed restrictions brought sandbagging approval. By this time part of the swimming pool was on its way out to sea.

WHEN WE MADE our most recent trip to the end of the key, sandbags were lined up along the properties. The sea seemed somewhat diffused into a couple of channels, and there was a bit more sandy walkway, indicating that maybe one day we could walk around

the end of the key again.

It's impossible to say, though, whether the changes have anything to do with the sandbagging or what will happen in the future.

Those who study the ways of the sea know it takes its own course and makes up its own mind. When you live close by and watch, you have to believe.

Margaret Miller was Suburban Life Editor for Observer-News-Sun for 18 years. She and her husband, Joe, have retired to Florida, where she writes Retirement Memos.

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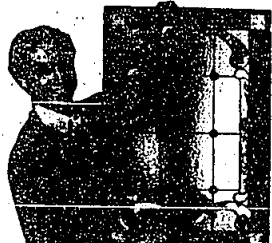
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