

Weather spurs mixed response

This week's sub-zero temperatures are an obvious scourge to the homeless. The cold can also cause problems for public services departments, and an extra load for hospitals and other agencies that deal with effects of the cold weather.

- More than 100 seniors turned out for the Oakland Livingston Human Service Agency (OLHSA) dinner, hot lunch Monday at Mercy Center in Farmington Hills, despite freezing weather. Stroke Club members showed up for a club meeting. And six of eight participants in the frail and elderly program braved the weather to meet. "It wasn't just the hardy that came out. That's the real lesson," said Loretta Conway, Farmington Hills Department of Special Services Senior Adult Division supervisor. "Older people will come out for a meal and companionship."

On Wednesday, a full complement of Mercy Center activities — exercise, dance, swimming, hot lunch — drew 130 seniors.

Senior outreach coordinator Mary DiManno arranged for "quite a few furnaces to be repaired," Conway said. "She works miracles. It's not a job you walk away from. She either finds a repairman as quick as possible or she arranges to take a senior somewhere or for them to go somewhere. If someone doesn't have heat, they could freeze to death."

VOLUNTEERS Of all ages deliver 130 meals each weekday to the homebound. "They're the unsung heroes and heroines," Conway said. "They go out in any kind of weather."

DiManno also arranges for volunteers to do grocery shopping for the homebound. Senior home chore coordinator Gail Wiercioch arranges for walkways to be shoveled.

- In Farmington, public services director Earl Billing said his city has been lucky so far, and avoided prob-

lems from the weather. "It hasn't created any problems," said Billing. There have been no water main breaks — a common occurrence during cold weather. The snow that fell the week before insulated the ground, helping the bone-chilling situation, he said.

- There were two water main breaks in other sections of Farmington Hills, which are not expected until later in the winter when frost is deep in the ground, according to public services director Tom Blasell. "We're in pretty good shape," he said. Roads were cleared of snow before this week's freeze arrived. "When it did freeze, they were not in bad shape," he added. The department's main concern late this week was general maintenance, including removing drifting snow.

- The cold weather is not bad for everyone. It has put a freeze on crime in the city, public safety director Frank Lando said. Crime also was down in Farmington Hills, according to the police reports.

- Although the staff remains prepared, Botsford General Hospital in Farmington Hills has not seen any cases of frostbite or hypothermia during this freezing week. Director of nursing in the hospital's emergency unit, Nan Blinn, attributes the lack of cases to a better educated public who know to stay inside and not attempt to exert themselves in cold weather. "People are taking better care of themselves."

- St. Alexander's Catholic Church in Farmington Hills missed the extremely cold weather, hosting the annual overnight shelter program last week. St. Alexander's is one of several area churches participating in the program — this week's shelter was at St. Michael's in Southfield, a spokeswoman said.

- At Farmington Hills Towing, representative of businesses who receive calls of dead batteries and frozen engine parts during cold weather, a spokeswoman said business had picked up this week but it wasn't excessively busy. "It's normal for the winter," she said.

Clothing needed for Detroit's homeless

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shelter, they would live," she said. "I knew there were people who won't make it to the mission. These people are not with it enough to get into the shelter."

"I realized there was a missing element. A gap — the people who don't make it to the shelters," she added.

So she and a friend headed out to the streets around the Detroit Rescue Mission, on Brainard between Second Street and Martin Luther King Drive, where they found plenty of cold and homeless people who welcomed the blankets and shoes.

"We cruised the streets and covered people up. There are people waking up this morning who otherwise wouldn't," she said after her first night out Tuesday.

Concerned Detroit police officers helped Feldman and her

friend locate some of the needy. They also searched in and behind dumpsters throughout the evening until about 11 p.m.

Feldman started her effort Tuesday night, which she is calling Operation Cover-up, after listening to WNIC-FM radio, which is promoting a collection effort of its own this week for the Detroit Rescue Mission and the Coalition of Temporary Shelters, or COTS. Morning deejay Jim Harper promised Feldman some of the blankets the station collects for her efforts.

The good will is spreading. According to Feldman, cold weather and a caring community is causing the effort to snowball.

Farmington Hills resident Mike Meltzer, owner of Waterbed World stores, has offered to collect blankets, boots and shoes for Operation Cover-up at his three area stores.

"If this will help facilitate things, that's great," he said.

THROUGH FRIDAY of this week, WNIC-FM radio is asking residents to donate anything for the needy, including menswear, toiletries, blankets and coats, according to Lisa Brancato. The items will be taken to COTS and the Detroit Rescue Mission, which are in desperate need of warm items, she said.

Feldman, known area-wide for her crusade for home day care, which started one year ago, said the Farmington-area movement is not highly organized, but it's working.

"There hasn't been time for that (organizing)," she said. "This freezing weather has caused an emergency situation. Last night, they (the mission) ran out of blankets to put around someone when they come in off the street. One man came in with only one shoe and now he's in danger of losing a foot."

Feldman and others have al-

ready made several trips to the area surrounding the Detroit rescue missions and are willing to make more as long as the freezing weather lasts, she said.

She's looking not only for blankets and boots and shoes, but for others willing to "caravan to Detroit to cover these people up."

"Even when it's not cold anymore, if they keep dropping off, then the items will be there when its cold again," she added.

Feldman and her Operation Cover-up can be reached by calling 851-9027.

To reach the Detroit Rescue Mission, take I-96 to Martin Luther King Drive and turn left. At Second Street, turn left. Go across Grand River. Brainard is one block past Grand River. Call 832-1333.

Staff writer Loraine McClish contributed to this report.



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Icy encounter

A Farmington public services worker Tuesday freezes property at the corner of Shiloh and Farmington roads, allowing area residents to ice skate on the Farmington Public Schools property. This week's sub-zero weather allowed the city to begin the freezing process, said public services director Earl Billing. It will take several days to make the surface

skateable. "I didn't even think we'd flood it this year" because of warmer weather, Billing said. "Last year we tried and were not successful." Earl Baumunk, director of vocational education for the school district, called the city/school rink a "community effort. I think it's good for the kids," he said.

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