

points of view

Homeless plight grows with cold snap

SNUGGLED DEEPLY into the comfortable overstuffed sofa, I could peek over the edge of the blanket to see lights and ornaments twinkling on the freshly cut tree.

Cold fingers, icy toes. Upcoming months of wind chill factors, and weather predictions during this pre-winter cold snap that sent the mercury plummeting well below zero last weekend, danced in my head.

When the first blizzard of winter hits, I never get warm again until the spring thaw.

Thinking about area firefighters training in sub-zero temperatures in Farmington Hills early last Sunday made me shiver even more. Deputy

Fire Chief Pete Baldwin called the weather "bitter."

But what truly chills me to the bone is thinking about those people who don't have a warmer or blanket in which to cuddle. Those who don't have a roof over their head and are buffeted by cold winds daily.

Those who are homeless, and don't have any halls to deck this time of year.

IN OAKLAND County alone, there are some 10,000 homeless people, according to recent statistics. They are all ages, ranging from small child to older adult, and most have a hard luck story that put them on the



Casey Hans

street. Some are alone, some are families. Those numbers grow when you add Wayne County and the city of Detroit.

Barb Sharp of the Oakland-Livingston Human Service Agency said "low cost housing is very hard to find, especially in Oakland County.

It's a long process." Besides seeing an increase in homeless families from all around the county, she is also seeing an increase in teenage mothers with young babies looking for housing.

OLHSA attempts to find housing for the homeless, and, if unable to do that, can refer them to a temporary shelter until they can find something permanent. The shelters are always busy this time of year, and Sharp offered a list of various items needed by shelters.

EVERYTHING FROM blankets, scarves and warm socks to soap, toothpaste and other personal items

can be used by shelters all year round. With the increase in babies, they can also use diapers and formula. Small can openers are a help for the homeless when they are given canned goods to eat.

To either give or receive help through OLHSA, call Sharp at 666-3974, or dial 399-2880 or 858-8188.

Throughout the tri-county area, homeless people arriving on the doorstep of any state Department of Social Services office will be given help, adds Margaret Anzinger, director of public affairs for the Wayne County office of DSS.

"We have a variety of programs for those who are unable to take

care of their needs," she said. DSS can also get the homeless emergency money during a crisis.

The DSS number is 256-1000; after 4 p.m. dial 256-1510 or 256-8661.

COLD FINGERS, icy toes, and bitter weather are never felt as much as by those who have nowhere to go.

Agencies say they are receiving many calls from area churches who want to hold drives and help the needy and homeless, especially this time of year.

But, as Sharp says, "we need it all year round. This is an on-going thing."

Ethnic pride healthy path to our survival

THE CONTRAST was striking.

As I leaned back in my chair to read this Monday's issues of the Observer & Eccentric, I noted with some real heartfelt warmth the stories that chronicle how residents have come to the aid of the thousands of families devastated by the earthquake in Soviet Armenia.

And then the warmth melted as I read the story about the skinheads over at Birmingham Groves High School.

Skinheads are teens who shave their heads and obnoxiously proclaim the rights of "white people," whoever that is supposed to include or exclude.

Seems the school authorities tired of the racist behavior and now are transferring two skinheads to neighboring Seaholm which, too, has its share of skinheads.

But Birmingham School Superintendent Roger Garvelink maintains this gives these teens a second chance in a new environment. That's fair. After all, they are just kids.

THE PROBLEM of racist attitudes is nothing new. Seaholm skinheads maintain that many other students privately feel the same way, but are reluctant to be as demonstrative.



Steve Barnaby

Unfortunately, that is probably true.

And while school officials should be commended for taking action, transferring a couple of students really won't solve the problem.

School districts throughout suburban Detroit have been reluctant to face racism head on. For many years, it was an easy issue to avoid. After all, most of those districts were nearly 100% white.

In the last two decades the racial and ethnic scene has changed in most districts. Students from various cultural backgrounds are being thrown together with little or no preparation.

Halls once filled primarily with Anglos are now teeming with Jews, blacks, Armenians, Chaldeans, Orientals, Armenians and just about any other group that comes to mind.

And that's good.

But we've got to help out. Parents, teachers, administrators and the rest of us have to pitch in and teach these kids that different doesn't mean bad, that diversity makes for a stronger society.

AND THE best place to accomplish this mission is in the classroom. But few, if any districts, have comprehensive programs to teach our children about other children's cultural heritage.

We have children who sit together everyday but who know almost nothing about each other. It's a recipe for disaster — guaranteed.

The skinheads, and many others, have to learn that ethnic and racial pride is more than just a downtown festival. It is an important element of basic survival.

After all, when the publicity dies down and everybody goes home, it will be the Armenians who will take care of themselves.

The president of this corporation, Richard Aginian, an Armenian, put it this way, "that's what we've got, our people, our religion, our ethnicity."

These are traits to be admired, not to be scorned. These are qualities to be taught, not to be hidden.

Who gives skinheads their ideas on rights?



Rich Perlberg

NEWS ITEM: Two students described as skinheads are transferred from one Birmingham high school to another after partaking in a fight that school officials suggested had racial overtones.

NEWS ITEM: Parents in the Rochester and Bloomfield Hills school districts complain that Christmas is being shortchanged in their children's schools because officials are reacting to the wishes of non-Christian students.

QUESTION: Does anyone see a relation between these two items?

Hold off on your letters. I am in no way suggesting that those who used a little Christmas in their schools in anyway share the hate-filled views espoused by the skinheads of the world.

BUT I DO think it's a good idea to listen to the skinheads. After all, they are listening to us.

Several skinheads were in our Birmingham offices last week to explain and defend themselves. I'm paraphrasing here, but part of the conversation went something like this: I'm tired, said a skinhead youth, of minorities always going on TV and saying how bad they've got it.

I'm tired, he continued, of hearing them always demanding their rights. Where do kids learn to say things like that? Why do they say that mi-

no, and Irv Wengrow, president of the Troy Jewish Congregation, gives some thoughtful reasons.

Christmas, he said, cannot be celebrated without celebrating its religious aspects.

"My objection is that the school is being used as an extension of the home and church," he said. "Why should public schools be the vehicle of religious parties and observances?"

"There is plenty of opportunity to observe Christmas in the home and church."

IT IS IRONIC that public schools are sometimes criticized for trying to impose on students values that should be taught in the home. Yet those who want Christmas in the schools are imposing on non-Christians perhaps the most important of all values — that of religious beliefs.

How, asks Wengrow, do you think children who do not celebrate Christmas feel when Christmas activities take place in school? "They get embarrassed and are ostracized," he said.

And how, I wonder, do teenagers who profess to be skinheads feel when they see adults criticizing schools for catering too much to religious minorities?

It's something to think about.

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