

Area churches take homelessness to heart

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Hills, acknowledged Belle Hargreaves, a parishioner and church secretary. "I'm sure some people thought of the homeless as real bums."

THAT WAS IN 1986, however, and Hargreaves is convinced most parishioners have changed their view.

"There but for the grace of God go I," she said. "And two paychecks ... go I," she said.

The change of attitude is reflected in the way parishioners now go about preparing meals, Hargreaves said. "At first we just provided soup and a sandwich," she said. "But as we got into it, the food got better. Now we provide a very good meal, complete

with salad and dessert."

Rita Mahler, a volunteer at St. Thomas More Church in Troy, acknowledged having misconceptions about the homeless when her parish signed up with SOS five years ago.

"I pictured a homeless person as somebody in their 50s with a bottle," she said. "It was an eye-opener for me to find that many are young people (mostly between 17 and 34) who simply don't have good job skills."

"Some can't go home because of pride, or whatever reason, and working at a minimum-wage job doesn't provide housing."

"Some are women," she said. "They might have a job and some place to leave the children. But the job doesn't pay enough."

In Birmingham, First Baptist Church and St. James Episcopal pool

their resources to provide shelter. "It's an opportunity to do more than just talk about the homeless," said the Rev. James V. Davidson, pastor of First Baptist. "It's an opportunity for our parishioners to relate one-on-one ... and to affirm the worth and dignity of the individual."

At Sacred Heart, on the border between Rochester Hills and Auburn Hills, more than 100 parishioners turned out when the church hosted about 25 people in October, said Sister Sharon Simon. Besides cooking meals, volunteers laundered sheets or towels as needed.

The daughter of one parishioner, a beautician, provided shampoos and haircuts, Simon said. "It did wonders for self-esteem," she said. Especially those who were going job hunting."

HOSTING A GROUP of homeless causes some inconvenience among parishioners, said the Rev. Philip Henke, pastor of Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church in Bloomfield Hills. "The church gets 'turned upside down,'" he said. "Bathrooms, for example, get a little messy when people use them for shaving."

One the positive side of that disruption, he said, "Our Fellowship Hall was turned into one big living room," where parishioners talked with their guests and got to know them as individuals.

It was heartening, Henke said, to see some churchgoers, dressed in business suits, arrive at the church early so they could provide a ride for one of their guests working at a minimum-wage job.

In West Bloomfield, three church-

es are pooling their resources to host a group of homeless for the first time this May. They are West Bloomfield United Methodist, Holy Spirit Lutheran and Prince of Peace Catholic.

"We're looking forward to it," said Beverly Teasdale, a member of Prince of Peace. "Each one of the churches has had at least 100 people sign up to help. It sounds like a worth while project."

In Southfield, St. David Episcopal Church has had a very positive experience with SOS, according to the Rev. Gary E. Callahan.

"We've had some real success stories," he said. "Besides providing shelter, meals and transportation, we've been able to help some of the homeless get jobs. It's been a pretty rewarding experience for us."

St. Patrick's Day Parade will honor U.S. soldiers

The United Irish Societies of Metropolitan Detroit will hold its 33rd annual St. Patrick's Day Parade at 2 p.m. Sunday, March 10, beginning at the corner of Michigan and Third, Detroit.

This year's parade will honor U.S. troops stationed in the Persian Gulf. Yellow ribbons will be distributed to marchers, along with traditional green shamrocks.

The First Michigan Colonial Life and Drum Corps will also participate. The corps, founded in 1975, is the last U.S. Bicentennial unit still active.

Other groups scheduled to perform during the two-hour parade include Celtic Pipes and Drums of Birmingham, the Detroit Fire Department Clown Troupe, costumed members of the O'Hare School of Irish Dancers, Grosse Pointe Highlanders Roller Blade, Moslem Temple Highlanders Pipe Band and other bands and special attractions. John Egan of Redford will appear as St. Patrick. Mike Sullivan of Farmington Hills is parade chairman.

Parade Grand Marshal Martin Fleming of Dearborn is credited with helping revive the parade in 1959. He has served as president of the Gaelic League and Irish-American Club, was president of the United Irish Societies and su-

pervised the parade for 10 years. The 1991 parade theme is, "A Downtown Irish-American Family Affair."

Toward that end, the parade will feature the second annual "Calling of the Clans." An invitation is extended to all area families of Irish descent to march in the parade.

Family members will receive information packets detailing the history of their family name in Ireland, get up-to-date information on St. Patrick's week activities and, perhaps, meet relatives they didn't know they had.

Individuals and families who wish to participate are invited to Electrical Workers Hall, 1358 Abbott, 12:30 p.m. on parade day.

The hall is east of Trumbull, three blocks south of Tiger Stadium. Marchers will leave for the parade at 1:45 p.m.

Irish Week will officially kick off Friday, March 8, when Fleming, Maid of Erin Edgen Marie Fallon of Plymouth, and her court, paint green shamrocks at Michigan and 12th, near Fred's Saloon. A luncheon will be held noon that day at Fred's, honoring Fleming, United Irish Societies President Ed Neubarber and other dignitaries.

Additional information is available by calling the St. Patrick's Day Parade office, 471-1540.

SOS generally spells success

The South Oakland Shelter (SOS) program has its share of successes. But it has also generated its share of controversy.

Last fall, for example, the Farmington Hills Zoning Board of Appeals initially rejected a request from Michigan National Bank that it be allowed to house a group of the homeless for a week at its headquarters on Inkster Road.

The zoning board ruled the bank could not provide housing for the homeless or anyone else - in an

area zoned more residential. The zoning board subsequently changed the vote and allowed the bank - the only corporate SOS participant - to house a group of the homeless in September.

But Farmington Hills got something of a blackeye because officials initially appeared to be indifferent to the plight of the homeless.

"People don't understand the homeless, so they're suspicious of programs designed to help them," said Lillian Melville, SOS director.

The homeless has its share of people with mental and psychological problems, Melville said. And there are those who abuse alcohol or drugs.

But most of them are people who are simply down on their luck, Melville said. They simply need a place to stay and a warm meal. They don't want to be homeless.

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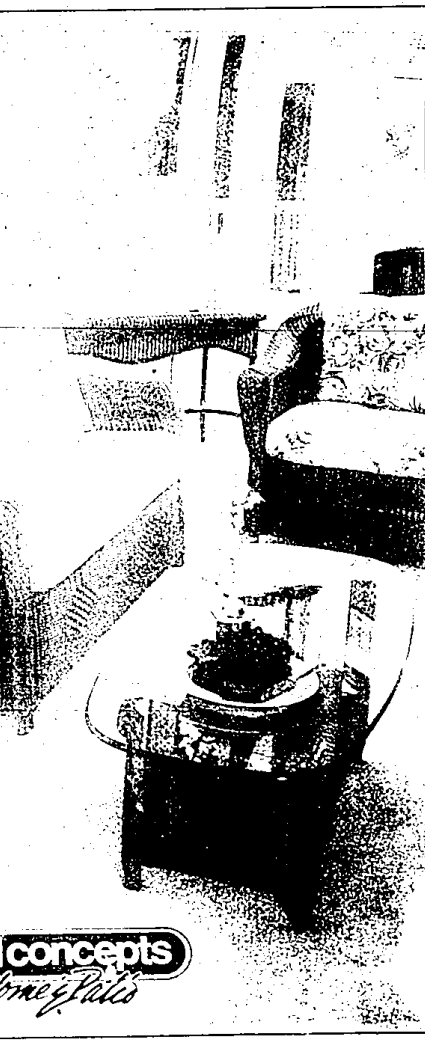
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Maple sugaring fest on tap at county park nature center

Celebrate the early days of spring during two March programs at the Independence Oaks Nature Center.

"Maple Magic" 1-2:30 p.m. on Saturday, March 9, will teach students how to produce maple syrup through methods perfected by the pioneers. In addition, there will be opportunities for tree-tapping and maple syrup testing.

The cost is \$1.50 per person. Participants can explore the color green and its role in nature during "What in the World is Green?" 1-2:30 p.m. Saturday, March 16.

Class members will observe the first greens of springtime during a slideshow and nature walk. Animal camouflage and a variety of plants will also be studied. A green St. Pa-

trick's Day snack will be provided. The cost is \$1 per person.

Pre-registration is required for all Nature Center events.

A weekday entry fee of \$3.50 vehicle for residents (46 vehicle for non-residents) and a weekend rate of \$4.50 vehicle for residents (47 vehicle for non-residents) may be charged for classes beginning before 4 p.m.

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the Oakland County Parks and Recreation Commission which was established in 1966. Independence Oaks, an Oakland County park, is on Sahasabaw Road, 2 1/2 miles north to I-75, near Clarkston.

For more information, call 625-6473.

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