

Leadership Oakland

County leaders experience taste of hunger

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

As many of us contemplate sitting around a bounteous Thanksgiving table, consider what kind of meal you can get for 55 cents.

Believe it or not, it can be nutritious.

That's what 45 participants in Leadership Oakland got recently at the session of the year-long program designed to acquaint them with the health and human resources available in the community.

Leadership Oakland is a program sponsored by the Council of Chambers of Commerce of Oakland County. Its goal is to familiarize bankers, lawyers, educators, businesspeople and others approaching roles of leadership with the strengths and weaknesses of Oakland County.

In its second year, the program deals with issues — and systems — like health care, courts and criminal justice, education and arts and culture.

Last week's session was centered at All Saints Episcopal Church in Pontiac, featuring representatives from agencies like Lighthouse — which provides food, housing and other assistance on an emergency basis — the Huron Valley Hospital and the United Way of Southeastern Michigan.

"WE WANTED the participants to realize the potential for adults in a structured system," explained Nancy Swain, director of Sheltering Arms, an adult day care facility in Birmingham.

Thomas Rathusnik, a vice president at Michigan National Bank in Troy, considered the session informative, and an eye-opening experience.

"I was impressed at how people are encouraged to help themselves... to regain their independence," he said after spending some time at Lighthouse. "Everybody made it clear that help is available. But they also made it clear that people were

to help themselves."

David Leeds of West Bloomfield was also impressed by his visit to Lighthouse. "They're efficient. They really move things along."

Leeds, a partner with Ernst & Young in Detroit, was referring to the way volunteers and staff at Lighthouse get donated items — like items of clothing — into the hands of the people who need them.

He considers Leadership Oakland an important program because it gives participants insight into systems they might not otherwise encounter.

"I came here from Houston," he said. "So it's enlightening for me to see what the community has to offer."

THE 55-CENT LUNCH was the idea of Lois M. Thieleke, a home economist from the Cooperative Extension Service of Michigan State University.

Rathusnik, Leeds and others were each given 55 cents with which to buy food items. The menu included: grilled cheese sandwiches, 10 cents; potato soup, 5 cents; milk, 10 cents;

sloppy joes, 20 cents, and so on.

Federal agencies estimate the minimum, per-day cost of feeding a person is \$2, said Thieleke, whose staff helps needy families stretch their food dollars. "That figures out to about 55 cents for lunch."

Thieleke's staff helps clients — including a 15-year-old girl from Troy, who is pregnant with her first child — learn family skills.

"We show people how to prepare a nutritious meal for 55 cents," she explained. "It's not easy. And they have to rely on commodity food. But they can do it."

Commodity food, she explained, is generally surplus food donated by government agencies to organizations like Focus Hope, which helps about 40,000 needy people in metro Detroit each year.

"Commodity food is generally high in starch and we usually have to scrape the fat off the meat," she said. "You can feed someone for \$2 per day, but you can't do it at King."

"You have to start from scratch, and that's what we're about. Teaching needy families how to manage."

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They may be purchased at Jack Cauley Chevrolet on Orchard Lake Road in West Bloomfield or by sending a check to the Alliance for the Mentally Ill, 15800 Reedmere, Birmingham 48025 and your ticket will be sent to you.

The alliance:

• Fights for rehabilitation programs such as a club house program and for social programs, such as drop-in centers.

• Advocates funds to support qualified hospitals with the best care for those who must be hospitalized and for more and better community living facilities for those who attempt a new life in the community.

• Stomps for funds for research that can unlock the mind and find ways to treat and possibly cure the various kinds of mental illness.

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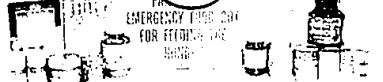
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