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Hammer's flair for style elicits a lot of comments.

"What I get mostly is, 'You're so color-coordinated.' And they say, 'I bet even your underwear matches. And I say yes, I have color-coordinated lingerie.'"

Another time she was at the Fox Theater when a woman stopped her and said, "You look so stunning, and that's so nice to hear at my age," Hammer said.

She has a lot of admirers, too. "She always dresses so elegantly," said Dorothy Woolley of Farmington Hills.

"She's different and elegant and she carries herself well. Whatever she wears she takes on that individual, if it's a mannish-type outfit or if it's something very feminine. She wears her clothes with so much presence. Whenever I saw her it was something different."

Hammer admits to a dramatic flair. In fact, as a young girl she wanted to dance with the Rockettes. But at 5-foot-3, she was one inch too short. "My father wouldn't let me show my legs anyway," she added.

But her patriotic father did allow her to dance for the USO.

"I just danced my feet off, and I loved wearing the costumes," Hammer said.

Career shelved

The dancing was put on hold when she got married and started having children. There were large gaps in their births, and Hammer was 40 years old when she had her last child, Jamie. When he started school, Hammer started a real estate career, and she's been active in private and business organizations ever since.

To name a few of the vast number of awards and affiliations, Hammer has been a member of the Farmington Neighbors Club, the Farmington Historical Commission and served as a eucharistic minister, usher and on the council at St. Clare of Assisi church.



High stepping: Betty Jo Hammer's closets are filled with 250 pairs of shoes and boots.

She also was American Business Woman Association, Birmingham chapter past president and voted Woman of the Year in 1991. Hammer served for five years on the board of directors of the Western Wayne Oakland Association of Realtors and received a special tribute. She also served as president of the Women's Council of Realtors, as well as in other positions and was named state of Michigan Woman of the Year in 1989.

Hammer was awarded the Omega Tau Rho, a national service award for the National Association of Realtors.

And for every situation Hammer, a grandmother of six, was dressed to the nines. About the expense of keeping three closets filled, Hammer said, "I don't smoke or drink. The money goes to my clothes."

"I feel very strong about always looking my best for the occasion," she added.



STAFF PHOTOS BY SHARON LEMIEUX

Sitting pretty: Betty Jo Hammer models a gold and white holiday favorite.

Center aids families

The holiday season is a time when children of many faiths in countries all over the world share a common excitement — looking forward to family celebrations, hoping for special toys.

Children at the St. Vincent and Sarah Fisher Center have wishes too. Like other children, they hope for holiday treats and special toys. But above all, over and over again, they wish for a family, a loving home and a normal life like other children, according to Sister Mary Patricia Larabell, center executive director.

Workers at the center work tirelessly with all the children and their families to help them overcome problems so they can be reunited. Contributions help provide many hours of counseling, home visits, and retraining necessary to mend a broken family and give families the tools they need

to change their lives.

More than 40 percent of the children at the center, however, who wish to return home to their families won't be able to go back, Sister Mary Patricia said. The home they left was a frightening place, the family unable to provide the love and protection every child deserves.

Many families can't be put back together due to severe drug abuse or mental health problems, Sister Mary Patricia said. But public support can help center workers fulfill the wishes of these children with a new family — one that will treasure and nurture their hopes for the future.

Contributions allow the center to give each child in residential treatment a safe haven, with the

counseling, structure and love they need to put behind them the fear and pain that haunts their dreams.

The center also works with foster families willing to open their homes and hearts to a difficult child, and provides intensive training and home support to make each placement successful. A new program has been established to go one step further by placing children in permanent homes with adoptive parents who have been recruited and trained.

If the program is successful, more than 30 hard-to-place children will be permanently placed next year. With public support, these children will finally have their greatest wish come true, Sister Mary Patricia said.

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