## **House mates**

## Program matches elderly with live-in aides

BY REBECCA WALDMAN STAPP WRITER

STAFF WATER

It was a match made in . . .
Oakland County.
Nilda, 63, needed help around the house, from big things like cooking and cleaning to small things like buttoning her clothes broperly. Her two children, who checked on her daily, started to worry about her living alone when she fell down her basement steps, breaking her ankle.

Mary Ann, 36, needed a place to live and a livelihood.

The two women met three

wanty Ann, 30, needed a place to live and a livelhood.

The two women met three months ago through a program that matches people who need companionship in their homes, called "home providers," with people who need affordable housing, or "home seekers."
"It solved a lot of problems for me and solved a lot of problems for their family," said Mary Ann. "It's working out well."

The program is called Homeshare, and it has been matching Oakland County residents who need each other for 16 years.

years.
Homeshare, a project of Oak-land Livingston Human Service Agency sponsored by the South-east Michigan Council of Govern-ments, has been especially effec-

■ 'About 99 percent of our providers are elderly. Some tell me, 'I'm just so frightened at night to be alone.

Bea Wallace Program coordinator Program coordinator

need." she said.
About 30 percent of seekers are
women, mostly in their 40s or 50s,
who were laid off from jobs or are
escaping abusive relationships.
About 50 percent of providers are
also women, or couples with one
spouse too lil for the other to care
for alone. In all matches, at least
one participant must be at least
55 years soid.
Wallace and her partner, Shirley Sherman, screen all applicants carefully for substance
abuse and bealth. References and
medical reports are a must for
both seekers and providers. "We
are really looking for good, competent seekers," Wallace said.
The program's original purpose
was to match people who needed
to share space, costs, and chores.
Wallace estimates now that only
about 5 percent of Homesbare
participants fall into this catego-

tive with senior citizens who need help, but who don't want to move into a nursing home. Some need only to share household expenses like food, rent, and utilities. Oth-ers require around-the-clock care.

"About 99 percent of our pro-viders are elderly," said program coordinator Bea Wallace. "Some tell me, 'I'm just so frightened at night to be alone."

Monthly, Wallace gets about 60 applications, meets about 10 potential pairs, and places about two. The process is time-consuming, taking up to three hours per application just to read.

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"It's like a marriage," Wallace notes. "I have to sit and talk with people, get a feeling of people, the measure is meeting needs, and that can be very emotional." The needs are sometimes so painful that Wallace has had to take a break several times over the past five years she's been a coordinator. "You really don't realize how many people are in

ry. Twenty percent of the matches are elderly people who simply want someone with a daytime job to keep them company at night.

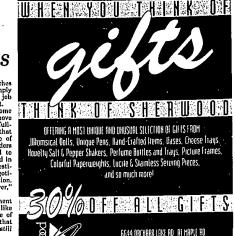
But the vast majority of home seekers, around 75 percent, move in and give constant care as a full-time job. Wallace is careful that meither side takes advantage of the arrangement. When providers claim that they can't afford of the more than room and food in exchange for service, she investigates their finances and negotimes their finances and negotimes. Wallace was expected to the service, she commitment from seckers, too. "We really like people to stay a good couple of years," Wallace said. "Some that I placed five years ago are still there."

The reasons for their commitment from not simply economic. "People do get attached to each other," Wallace said. "It's a blessing."

Homeshere is looking for home

other, Wannes and It's a bless-ing."

Homeshare is looking for home seekers and home providers. For more information, call OLHSA at 958-5132.





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