Churches to host homeless

By Rebecca Waldman State Wester

By Refrecca Waldman
Staty Westes
Oakland County's roving homeless shelter will be taking up residence in churches around Birmingham. West Bloomfield, Bloomfield Township and Farmington Hills for the rest of 1994.

Every week between now and New Year's Day, the South Oakland Shelter (SOS) has booked seven-day stays for 30 homeless men, women and children in places like Bloomfield Township's Nastivity Episcopal Church, Farmington Hills' Orchard United Methodist Church and Birmingham's Northbrook Presbyterian Church, to name a few.

The organization's headquarters is in Royal Oak, but it hann't had a permanent place to house its clients aince it began in December 1985. Even so, voluntering churches and synagoues have been clamoring to offer their space in increasing numbers.

"SOS has gotten real popular," said Shelia McEntee, a member of Birmingham Unitarian Church in West Bloomfield and coordinator of its SOS week. "Everybody wants SOS in their organization. It's a well-managed program, and I think most sites that have participated in it have never had a bod incident."

Only 30 people can be taken into the program at a time, and they are carefully screened by SOS's four-member staff for substance abuse and other serious problems.

"Usually, I promise (each site) 28 nice suva and two stinkers."

SOS's tour-manners stance abuse and other serious problems.

"Usually, I promise (each site) 28 nice guys and two stinkers," joked Lilliam Melville, executive director of SOS. "But there are no a stendol."

🖪 'Everybody wants SOS in their organization.

had a bad incident."

Sheila McEntee, a member of Birmingham Unitarian Church in West Bloomfield and coordinator of its SOS

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When SOS began nine years ago, it could get accommodations for clients only 17 weeks out of the year. Now, all 52 weeks are sign upon a first-come, first-except sign upon a first-come, first-except basis. Some sites vary the time of year they provide shelter. Increasingly, however, sites are organizing their calendars so that they take their turn around the same time each year.

Year.

That's because, in part, each site needs between 100 and 150 volunteers throughout its SOS week, working in several categories of jobs. People are needed to serve dinner and breakfast, pack lunches, transport clients to and from work or other places they need to go and serve on night watch as clients steep.

watch as clients sleep.

"We're always (open to SOS) around Christmastime, because some members have that time off to participate," said Janet Forgione, SOS week coordinator at S. Hugo of the Hills Church in Bloomfield Hills. "We find that's the best time for us, because of the availability of certain areas on the premises normally occupied by our school."

SOS week a St. Hugo's is open.

SOS week at St. Hugo's is orga-nized by the church's Christian Service Commission, which For-gione chairs. The commission be-gins recruiting volunteers in No-vember for the late December

"It's a big undertaking. We need up to 100 volunteers for that week," Forgione added. "It's a rewarding thing to do from the church's perspective," said McEntee, whose church will

OFFICE & CENTER

Helping hand: Lillian Melville is executive director of South Oakland Shelter, which helps homeless people find temporary shelter.

temporary shelter.

host SOS Nov. 13-20.

"For the church, it's a
transforming event. We have it in
the social hall, where services are
the lel). Sunday the 13th we put
away chair sefter worship and
start setting up racks for separating the women's sleeping area.
Sunday the 20th is especially
hard, because we have to be set
up for services by 8 am."

Still, site members gain a lot
from volunteering. McEntee said.
"People in the church are very
conscious that their church is
trying to help. It raises their comfort level. They may start off serving food the first year, because
that's what they're comfortable
with. They get more involved in
following years, because they
know that people in the program

are the same as they are, just at a different income level." Churches offering space, food and transportation through Jan. 1, 1993, are:

■ Oct. 23-30, Nativity Episcopal Church, Bloomfield Township. ■ Nov. 6-13, Orchard United Methodist Church, Farmington

Hills.

Nov. 13-20, Birmingham Uni-■ Nov. 13-20. Birmingham Uni-tarian Church, West Bloomfield.
■ Nov. 20-27. Northbrook Pres-byterian Church, Birmingham.
■ Nov. 27-Dec. 4, Covenant Bap-tist Church, West Bloomfield.
■ Dec. 11-18. First United Meth-odist Church, Troy.
■ Dec. 25 to Jan. 1, St. Hugo of the Hills Church, Bloomfield

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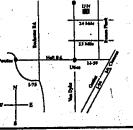
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