

NSH Patients Start Own Businesses

'Sheltered Workshop' Helping Elderly Build Self-Esteem In A Great American Tradition

By MARGARET MILLER

A cup of coffee, a shelf of well-made gift items and a brand new contract—these illustrate great new strides toward productive life for many of the older patients at Northville State Hospital.

The coffee was poured and served last Labor Day for a staff member at the mental hospital by a lady of advancing years who had been a patient in the geriatrics division for some time.

"I used to sell things," she told a staff member. "That will be five cents."

The idea clicked with other patients, and the staff members who had been working toward developing it. Before long there was a patient-run refreshment business in the geriatrics division, where Dr. Fulvio Ferrari is staff psychiatrist and director of medical services.

The patients themselves named the business "Handi-Korner," and recently they added a new line—serving hot lunch once a week for staff, patients and visitors to the

hospital. They earn a small wage for their work.

But that's only part of the story.

THE REST CONCERNS a sheltered workshop—also on a pay basis—created for the hospital patients by Bernard Plummer, registered rehabilitation therapist who began work at Northville in January.

So far, the workshop's main output has been skillfully-crafted gift items—pillows, stuffed toys, feathered flowers.

But Plummer said the workshop has a contract with the Ford Motor Co. for some piecework production, and he feels sure contract work will soon be the biggest part of the workshop.

"Rehabilitation" is the theme in all this activity.

Explained Plummer in sociological terms:

"The senior population of our country continues to grow, and so must the senior aged population of our psychiatric facilities.



Through increased concern and more enlightened observations, we are finding that much of this population is truly not qualified for residence at a state mental hospital, but is, instead, in need of assistance from those facilities which foster moderations in life, socio-psychic understanding of aging and opportunities to continue living."

Added Dr. Ferrari:

"The aim of any mental hospital is to return as many patients as possible to meaningful relations to the community. There's a special problem with the aging mental patients who have been excluded from society by retirement and misunderstanding."

"They suffer tremendous depression, and find no sense of self-worth and self-esteem."

Dr. Ferrari said work therapy has been tried in mental hospitals, because patients need something to do and the institutions have low budgets.

"But it was a trick—in a way a very dirty trick," he said. "You couldn't convince the patients it was the answer, and you couldn't convince me either."

The Handi-Korner, he added, "is an example of the good American concept of free enterprise, and it does work."

THE EXPANSION of the business certainly follows the American dream.

Equipped with a coffee urn provided by the staff, the ladies earned \$1.80 the first day they were in operation.

That went up to a fund of more than \$1,000 as the month of April 1968 got underway.

During the month, deposits were nearly \$100 more than withdrawals for supplies, and patients' salaries amounted to \$110. The business loaned money to the patient in charge of bookkeeping for an adding machine. It also bought a shiny new refrigerator.

Then some of the profit was donated to purchase a protective fence for the hospital ground area used by senile patients.

Dr. Ferrari, who never misses a chance to buy a cup of coffee, says the difference in some of the patients over recent months is "absolutely incredible."

Plummer, who previously set up sheltered workshops in two other institutions, divides his time between working at the hospital and driving around to get orders and materials and contracts.

Because the workshop is aimed at helping patients resume places in society, he said, it has many characteristics of an "outside" work situation.

Patient-workers have specific times to report for duty, and they earn a specific wage. More and more responsibility will be given as they can handle it, Plummer said.

There are plans to spread the sheltered workshop idea to other sections of the hospital—the young adults next. And other work is going forward to set up similar systems in some of the area nursing homes where many of the NSH patients locate later.

A whole new living dimension has been added for many whose lives previously held only restriction.



MACHINES HUM — Some of the workshop patients operate sewing machines to make stuffed animals, pillows and other craft items. Others cut foam rubber for stuffing.



FEATHER FLOWERS — Carefully crafted flowers are made of brightly-colored feathers. It's hard to keep up with orders, staff members report.



WARES ON DISPLAY — A huge shelf at one end of the workshop room holds some of the

patient-made items that can be purchased.

Custom Is Legalized

School Borrowing Eased

School districts will be able to borrow against anticipated state aid more easily under a bill that has passed the Michigan Legislature.

The bill allows school districts to bypass the State Municipal Finance Commission, watchdog over local units' borrowing, when they want to borrow against anticipated state aid.

The bill legalizes past practice. The practice had been challenged in a court suit, which prompted the Senate to tack the borrowing freedom onto another bill as an amendment.

THE HOUSE concurred, 62-33, but only after a sharp debate.

"No one will have control of the thing," complained Rep. Joseph M. Snyder, D-St. Clair Shores.

He said the amendment would hand school districts "an open checkbook."

However, Rep. Louis E. Schmidt, R-Livonia, said the legislation is needed to allow school districts to continue to function in summer months.

"Most of the school districts are not carrying over money

after June," he added. "Some have payrolls in June and July. They have to buy supplies. They don't get state aid until August."

A four per cent interest ceiling is imposed on the borrowings on state aid under the amendment, which also stipulates that they may be paid

before maturity.

"IT'S NECESSARY for school districts to continue these borrowings," said Rep. Clifford H. Smart, R-Walled Lake, chairman of the House Education Committee.

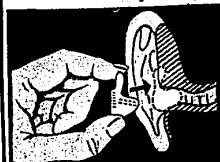
"They wouldn't be in such trouble if they just watched

their administration costs," said Rep. Warren N. Goemiere, D-Roseville.

The House bill originally was intended to permit school districts to expand their bonding powers to five per cent of their total assessed valuation.

This provision was rejected.

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