

Census taker does more than tally peoples' noses

By ROSE WEBER

Armed with a bright smile, friendly personality and sensitivity Barbara Wilson persuades strangers to tell her the most intimate details of their lives.

She asks questions about expenditures for home alterations and repairs, for fuels, utilities, household help, clothing, food and beverages, major household equipment and home furnishings.

Also about cars and other vehicles, trips and vacations, insurance, medical services, school tuition and books, rent, the value of real estate owned, mortgage payments and debts.

And before she is through Mrs. Wilson knows the age, educational background and income of everyone in the unit including children over 14.

HOW DOES she manage this? She wears a badge identifying her as a member of the Bureau of the Census.

"Most people are surprised that the bureau does anything except count people. But we are the fact-gathering arm of the government and conduct all kinds of surveys throughout the year," Mrs. Wilson explained.

Despite the fact that she asks the kinds of questions most people do not like to answer she has received good cooperation.

"THEY REALLY don't know what they are getting into at the first interview. We start slow with background questions on the family unit," she explained.

But before the five parts of the survey are over Mrs. Wilson will have filled 121 pages with answers to questions like:

Have you or any member of the unit purchased for yourself or as a gift any undergarments such as undershorts, bras and body stockings?

Or, have you purchased or received as a gift any musical instruments,

musical accessories, pets, encyclopedia and other sets of books, other items costing more than \$15?

BECAUSE each question has to be answered in exact detail, extensive records must be kept by each family member.

"People are just great about it. Even the kids away at college do a beautiful job of keeping track of their day-to-day expenditures," she said.

She remembers the little old lady who wrote down every penny she spent every time she left the house, and the many people who keep records down to the penny even though some items can be rounded off to the nearest dollar.

"And when they do that I write it just like they give it to me and when I get home erase the cents and round it off," Mrs. Wilson said.

THE MOST sensitive areas are the final accounting of assets and liabilities in the fifth section.

"For some reason people don't

mind telling me about debts but they are hesitant about the assets. So I have learned to go backwards and do the debts first," she said.

The households to be surveyed are selected by computer according to address not occupant name. No information is ever released on individual responses, only in statistical form.

THERE ARE 35,000 households in this area participating in two surveys on consumer expenditures.

Information gathered will be used to revise the Consumer Price Index. The index is a statistical measure of the changes in prices of goods and services on a monthly basis.

The data is used by labor and business groups in developing retirement and health insurance programs. Government agencies use it in formulating social and economic policy.

Collective bargaining contracts provide increases in wages based on changes in the index.

The survey is conducted every ten years and has been since the early 1890's," she said.

MRS. WILSON became an interviewer because she wanted to learn about politics and how politicians get elected.

"I applied in West Virginia when we lived there and have been doing all kinds of surveys since that first census job," she said.

She loves meeting people and when a survey is over feels like she is losing friends.

"In spite of all that I know about them, I become fast friends with a lot of them," she said.

DURING the past two years she only has encountered two people who were unpleasant. "I never went to their houses at night or on a dark day, and I put a note on the information that I wasn't satisfied I had gotten the truth," she said.

But she feels it is a fascinating job and can hardly wait to start the training session for the next survey in April.

Blood pressure exam necessary

"More than 23 million Americans have high blood pressure, but at least half of them don't even know it," reports Dr. Theodore Cooper, director of National Institutes of Health's National Heart and Lung Institute (NHLI) in Bethesda, Md.

High blood pressure, (hypertension) is of great public health concern. It is frequently unrecognized and untreated.

Last year NHLI, along with other federal agencies and private organizations, mounts a national program to educate the public to the dangers of high blood pressure.

As a focal point for public education, a High Blood Pressure Information Center has been established within the NHLI to disseminate information on this

condition. It is hoped that by educating the public the toll of unnecessary personal and economic loss from the consequences of high blood pressure will be reduced.

The message is quite simple. Get your blood pressure checked. You don't know whether you have high blood pressure unless you do, because there are usually no symptoms.

If you have high blood pressure it can generally be reduced through changes in diet or with medication. If your doctor prescribes medicine for high blood pressure, be sure to take it and continue to follow his directions.

Uncontrolled high blood pressure forces the heart to work harder and may cause early failure.

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