



## Long welfare lines forebode bleak year

By ROBERT KIPPER

OAKLAND COUNTY—It was a busy way to start the new year. Many persons began arriving at 7 a.m., hoping to reduce the long waiting period by being the first in line. Within two hours the parking lot and the waiting room were jammed.

The crowd included many different age groups, blacks and whites, women and children. Some were smartly dressed while others wore what in other circumstances would be their work clothes. Some read books or newspapers. A few talked. Most stared blankly ahead, waiting for their names to be called and end the unpleasant task of picking up welfare payments for another month.

The scene took place at the Pontiac office of the Michigan Department of Social Services. Thursday morning, the first working day of 1975. It was both a reminder of how progressively worse economic conditions became in 1974 and a bleak preview of a situation that almost all county and state officials expect to get much worse in the months ahead.

**ALL WHO** receive food stamps, general assistance relief or aid to dependent children checks in Oakland County come to the Pontiac office for payments. Because this office deals with the welfare load in the county, its long lines and heavy caseloads reflect only a portion of the unemployment problem in the county.

People usually turn to welfare only when they don't qualify for unemployment checks or when they have already passed the maximum period for receiving unemployment checks.

As the eligibility period to receive unemployment runs out for more and more people, however, the welfare lines will grow longer. And even with millions of extra federal dollars for public service job programs and with an increase in county funding, no county official can give assurance of staying even with the problem this year, let alone catching up with it.

**NO ONE** is certain exactly how high the unemployment rate is at this moment.

The latest figures of the Michigan Employment Security Commission show that 45,614 persons received unemployment checks in Oakland County in November. As of October, the unemployment rate for the county was reported at 7.1 percent.

Howard Rosso, director of the Oakland County Department of Social Services, estimated that the current

unemployment rate for Oakland is roughly nine percent, compared to 5.5 percent at the beginning of last year.

The demand for food stamps in Oakland County more than doubled last year, Rosso reported. More than 2,500 families received food stamps in November compared to 1,150 last January.

**AS OF NOVEMBER** more than 10,000 families received aid to dependent children (ADC) payments—the highest ever in Oakland County. In January of 1974, 9,232 families received ADC and the year before that fewer than 2,000 families.

The number of general assistance checks, which went as high as 2,500 in August, is down slightly to 2,056. However, substantial increases are expected this year.

"The first half of 1975 will be worse than anything we've experienced probably since the 1958 recession," Rosso said.

**WHILE COMMUNITIES** like Royal Oak, Pontiac, Ferndale and Hazel Park have been hardest hit by unemployment, the burden of dealing with the problem falls on all county taxpayers to an extent.

General assistance payments are covered mostly by the Oakland County budget, which picks up 60 percent of the cost, with the state paying the balance.

In 1974, the county budgeted \$1.6 million for general assistance—a sum that lasted only to the first of October. The Department of Social Services had to go back to the county board of commissioners on three extra occasions to get the \$335,000 more it needed to make it through 1974.

This year's budget allocates \$2.9 million for general assistance, or enough to handle 2,600 welfare cases. Rosso, without a good deal of conviction, said that should be enough to meet the year's needs.

**TO FIGHT** rising unemployment, massive increases in federal programs, administered through the county, have been made.

More than \$14 million in additional federal funds are expected this year to increase five-fold the various job and training opportunities offered the unemployed and disadvantaged in Oakland County.

Most of these funds are provided through the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA), passed in Washington last year.

The most ambitious program will create up to 1,400 public service jobs

this year in the county. Some \$6.7 million has already been allocated for 700 new jobs while a recently adopted emergency job program will create another 700 jobs with \$6.5 million more funding.

**ROBERT CHISHOLM**, director of manpower for Oakland County, said that unlike many federal programs the CETA plan provides a great deal of flexibility. The federal government doesn't dictate what type of jobs should be created, leaving this to local officials.

School districts, townships and city governments throughout the county have submitted requests for new employees, who would be hired with federal funds to work for these local units in various capacities. The county determines, based on the unemployment picture in these communities, where the new federally paid workers are most needed.

As a result, jobs as diverse as patrolmen, statisticians, cooks, janitors, receptionists and maintenance men will be created to accomplish two goals: Reducing the unemployment rate while assisting local units, most of which had to eliminate personnel due to budget shortages of their own.

**OTHER EXPANDED** programs:

- On-the-job training slots for adults will be increased from 40 positions in 1974 to 200 this year.

- The program for skilled classroom training for adults will be increased from 200 positions to 400, thanks to an additional \$1.7 million in federal funds.

- The training program, geared for high school drop-outs and 14 through 21-year-olds, will enroll 700 youths in 1975, more than double last year's figure, thanks to an additional \$1 million in federal funds.

These measures, however expanded, will still only provide marginal relief to the county's unemployment problem.

"With 35,000-40,000 unemployed in the county," said Chisholm, "there will still be a tremendous gap."

It already takes double the time to process a welfare application than it did at the beginning of last year. Waits for welfare checks and food stamps can already extend two and three hours. Employees with the Department of Social Services are required to work extra hours and sometimes Saturdays to stay with the increased workload.

But, however bleak the beginning of 1975 appears, the expectation is the middle will be worse.



Photographed by Lelan Hu

# WINTER ANTIQUE WALK

**BROWSE'S DELIGHT...**

Stroll through an exhibit of antiques and Memorabilia in comfortable 72° temperature. Have a day of entertainment playing the old-time slot machine.

There's even a single cylinder Swiss music box from the late 1800's for the true collector. It plays 10 tunes. Don't miss this fine collection brought to you by specially-selected dealers.

**CUSTOMERS' APPRECIATION DAYS AT LIVONIA MALL**

Starts Tuesday, Jan. 21 at the Cinema

**FREE MOVIE — FREE PRIZES — NEW TIME — 9:45 or 10:15**

Have an enjoyable morning on us

**Livonia Mall**

Open daily 'til 9:30 p.m. Sunday 11-6 p.m.

7 Mile  
at Midtown