

S.O.S.

War widows recruit support to restore their benefits

By Jeanne Whittaker
staff writer

WHEN THERESE GALL of Farmington stood with other war widows observing this year's Memorial Day services at Arlington National Cemetery, the prayers the women uttered were not only spoken for America's fallen soldiers, but for a ground swell of public opinion that will support the rights of their survivors.

Gall looks like any other attractive suburban wife and mother walking through the shops and malls of Oakland County. However, underneath the stylish haircut and the sporty, tailored clothing, Gall is one of the nation's war widows who have formed action groups to lobby Senators and Representatives on behalf of their dead husbands.

Like Gall, they are asking the nation's congressmen and women to defeat legislation that will cut survivors' benefits promised to every serviceman and woman who joined the service after 1957.

Unknown to many of the nation's war widows, the 1981 Federal budget-cutting efforts included major reductions in Social Security survivors' benefits, Gall said. Included in the cuts are the elimination of the student benefit for full-time students ages 18-22, and elimination of the widow's benefit when the youngest child turns 16, rather than 18. The latter, said Gall, has been on the books since 1940.

GALL IS SEEKING war widows to join a local movement to support a national outcry being led by Madeline Van Wageningen of California, founder of Survivors of Sacrifice. Van Wageningen, said Gall, was so angry at the government's intent that she sent her flag back to the President.

"Eliminating the benefits won't help cut the budget deficit that much," said Gall. "The whole package wouldn't cost more than one F-14 (fighter jet). This program will self-destruct in 23 years, because all the children will be grown up."

Gall sees the effect of the cutback as more than a futile gesture to save the nation's budget. She also sees it as an indication of a government that doesn't keep its word.

"People are starting to realize that the government reneges on its word," she said. Referring to testimony Van Wageningen made before the House subcommittee on compensation, pension and insurance, Gall said active duty military personnel are regularly instructed in their benefits.

DURING THE instruction, she said, they learn that in addition to the VA benefits provided, they have the pro-

'While thousands of young men rioted, resisted, or went to Canada, others heeded their nation's call. The Department of Defense lost no opportunity to advise them of the generous benefits their patriotic service entitled them to. Over 50,000 went to their deaths in Vietnam, all of them believing the government reassurances that specific social security benefits, in addition to Veterans Administration compensation, would protect their families.'
Subcommittee on Compensation, Pension and Insurance

tection of Social Security benefits. Because of the cuts, Gall said, children who entered college after May 1, 1982, will not be eligible for educational payments. Non-working mothers whose youngest child reached 16 after that date will lose up to two years of her benefits.

"In January 1965, Social Security benefits for college students were established, just in time for the war in Vietnam. While thousands of young men rioted, resisted, or went to Canada, others heeded their nation's call. The Department of Defense lost no opportunity to advise them of the generous benefits their patriotic service entitled them to."

"Over 50,000 went to their deaths in Vietnam, all of them believing the government reassurances that specific Social Security benefits, in addition to Veterans Administration compensation, would protect their surviving families."

"FOR MANY war widows, the elimination of these benefits is devastating. It is impossible to know how many children there are, or the whereabouts of all the widows because the privacy act restricts any lists getting around to

help us find them. We know 58,000 were killed (in Vietnam), so we figure between 50,000-60,000 children are involved."

"It's not that we are asking more than other widows. Regular widows, if their husbands are killed on the job, can sue the employer. But, because our husbands worked for the government, that's not open to us."

Benefits for survivors of men killed in the service were initiated, she said, because the nature of their husbands' work made them ineligible for conventional insurance packages.

"I AM NOT a needy person. But, some of the letters I've received are overwhelming. It was hard to see the nation honoring their war dead and still strip them of our benefits."

Although Gall considers herself luckier than most war widows, she knows what the others experience, she said. She is the mother of two children whose futures were placed in jeopardy when her husband died.

A Marine company commander with 16 years in service, he died in Vietnam in 1967, just two weeks before his second tour of duty was completed. When she remarried in 1970, she said, she became part of only 6 percent who eventually remarry.

Though her sons are now almost grown, she feels impelled to assist Survivors of Sacrifice, she said.

"Basically, there is a handful of women doing this for the rest of them." Her second husband, she added, has been very supportive of her work on behalf of the widows.

"WHEN SURVIVORS of Sacrifice contacted me last December, I was the only widow in Michigan that they knew. In Michigan, with media coverage, we've been able to contact 20-25."

"I'd like to hear from any of them who live in the area. A lot of them don't realize the size of the package that they are losing."

"We need to let Congress know that people are outraged," she said with determination.

In addition to recruiting other widows, she said, she travels to Washington to lobby Congress on behalf of all widows with children.

"You wouldn't believe the reactions I've gotten from some Congressmen," she said with a grimace. From some, she said, she received a "Now, now, dear, don't get upset" type reception. She was encouraged, however, by the supportive reception the widows received at services at Arlington on Memorial Day.

"THE AMPHITHEATER was packed when the President came to speak." Though the President did not



Statistics show that only 6 percent of women widowed by the Vietnam war have remarried. An estimated 60,000 children will be affected by federal

budget cuts that deprive them of benefits the government promised their late fathers.

attend the special service for war widows at the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial, "a Marine Corps aide brought us a letter from the President."

The letter and news that several Congressmen have initiated legislation on behalf of the survivors' rights, she said, has been the most encouraging news to date.

Much work still has to be done, she said. "The civilian population has offered a great deal of help."

But, she said, she needs the names

and the support of Michigan's war widows during the fight ahead. She has opened a post office box, P.O. Box 223, Plymouth 48170, to accept inquiries from those who want to contact her.

She is available at 469-0885 to answer questions and recruit volunteers.

ARMED FORCES Information Services literature regarding the welfare of dependents is issued to every serviceman before reporting for active duty or directly after entering service,

she said.

Gall quoted, "You owe it to your wife, your children, or your parents to put your affairs in order today, so they will know what to do and what to expect, if it becomes necessary, tomorrow."

For the nation's war widowed, she said, it is already tomorrow.

"It's too late for their husbands to object to their rights being taken away," she said.

Public support asked

Budget cuts clip Displaced Homemaker's program

By Lorraine McClish
staff writer

Oakland Community College (OCC) staff members who put together the Displaced Homemaker program last fall were just starting to fly high with their successes when state funds were cut off and their bubble burst.

Now Joan Maloney is spending her summer attempting to pick up the pieces, adamant that the program "which has done more to make more people independent in the shortest amount of time isn't going to be lost."

The program is designed to bring

women who have spent the most of their adult life as homemakers back into the working force.

Maloney, counselor and instructor for the Displaced Homemaker program on Orchard Ridge Campus, says she is now turning to the private sector, seeking contributions to keep the classes going.

She says she speaks for her counterparts on all OCC campuses when she says, "All of us had waiting lists since the program was announced, which was certainly proof of its need. And we're still talking calls every day, ask-

ing when the next class is going to start."

"We proposed to take 150 women in the program when we got the grant, and with a bit of innovation we were able to fit 310 women into classes."

"That's a hefty number of those who recognized their need for this kind of help and were willing to work for it," she said.

"We are not happy about saying 'no' to the callers now."

MALONEY IS not saying 'no,' at least for the present.

Working with staff from all campuses together with some of the women who have gone through the Displaced Homemakers' program, a speaker's bureau is now under way.

Armed with a video tape Maloney started before she was aware that funds from the State Department of Vocational Education would be cut, the women hope to spread the word about the validity of the program throughout the county.

"We want to talk to every service club, every church group, every organization that will put us on their agenda," she said. "I want to show the tape everywhere I can because it tells our success story so succinctly."

"If money is going to come to continue this, it will have to come from people who know what we're doing here and are willing to contribute to its continuance," she said.

Maloney's tape was begun as a routine project to show the results of a pilot program. It was carried out with two widows and one divorcee, who vol-

'We have seen the woman in here who hadn't made a decision in 20 years, the woman who couldn't talk about her divorce without crying, the woman elated with the discovery that her daydream had turned into a real clear-cut, reachable goal.'

—Joan Maloney
counselor



unteered to tell their before and after stories in interviews.

Maloney called those stories "typical of their plight when they came into the class, typical of their (ultimate) schooling, the jobs and the self-confidence that came as they went through the program."

Nine Displaced Homemaker programs were funded in Michigan. OCC's money will run out Aug. 31.

THUS FAR, Maloney has gotten one check to extend the program from Farmington Business and Professional Women, given because one of its members benefited from the Displaced Homemakers sessions. Another sum of money has been pledged by the congregation of Antioch Lutheran Church.

"We have seen the woman in here who hadn't made a decision in 20 years, the woman who couldn't talk about her divorce without crying, the woman elated with the discovery that her daydream had turned into a real clear-cut, reachable goal," Maloney said.

"What we did in the program was to introduce a brand-new way of thinking. What we have is real living examples of proof that it worked."

MALONEY, a West Bloomfield resident, began coming to OCC's Women-center as a student in a program for women who were considering re-entering school or the job market.

She stayed on as a volunteer and then took the job of directing the Displaced Homemaker program. She is now co-ordinator of the program for all four campuses, as well as its public relations person.

She didn't expect that forming a speaker's bureau, or writing letters for contributions to keep the program going would be part of her summer, but says she feels compelled to do it.

"I find it ironic in this economic climate that a source to make women independent is cut off. This is a self-help course to get people off public assistance. We did that. We are doing that. With the community's help, we'll keep on doing that," she said.

The Displaced Homemaker program is not a part of Womencenter, though space assigned the program is granted by Womencenter on Orchard Ridge Campus. Maloney will take calls there, 476-9400, Ext. 509.

NASA series continues

Farmington Branch Library presents its second series of award-winning films produced by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday.

"A Man's Reach Should Exceed His Grasp," is the story of flight and of man's reach for new freedom through aviation and the expansion of space. From the Wright brothers' flight at Kitty Hawk to the landing on the moon, the film depicts the fulfillment of the ancient dream of flight.

Voices of scientists and statements by writers, poets and philosophers document man's search for knowledge. Narrated by Burgess Meredith, this film won the Golden Eagle Certificate, Council on International Non-Theatrical Events, 1972; First Prize Certificate of Creative Excellence, Interna-

tional Festival of Aeronautics and Space Films, Paris, 1972; and the Silver Phoenix, Atlanta International Film Festival, 1972.

"A New View of Space" is a visual overview of the space program, using photography to tell the story. The film was compiled from a selection of more than nine million feet of film in the NASA Film Depository. It was awarded the Gold Camera Award, U.S. Industrial Film Festival, 1973; Silver Cup and Diploma XXth Rassegna International, Rome 1973; Blue Ribbon Trophy, 15th Annual American Film Festival, New York, 1972; and the Golden Eagle Certificate, 1973.

Other NASA films in the series will be shown on July 29 and Aug. 5. There is no admission charge.