

# Focus:HOPE

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(O7A)

## Rising unemployment brings agency to Oakland

By Kathy Parrish  
staff writer

For years, Focus:HOPE has been making sure Wayne County mothers, babies and senior citizens are well fed. And many Oakland County residents helped make that effort possible. Now 15,000 Oakland residents will also get help from the Detroit civil and human rights organization.



Operating out of a mobile home at 1500 Oakman Blvd. in downtown Pontiac, Focus:HOPE is distributing special food packages to pregnant and postpartum women, children up to age 6 and seniors 60 and older. When remodeling is finished on the back terminal at that location, the food center will resemble a grocery store. Residents will be able to wheel shopping carts through and select their own groceries but they won't pay a thing at checkout. "Hunger is a reality. I don't think anyone can deny that," said Eleanor

Josaltis, Focus:HOPE's associate director.

"We're available wherever there's a need."

Started after the 1967 Detroit riots, Focus:HOPE has grown from three volunteers to 25,000. The civil and human rights organization employs 150 people to run programs ranging from the prescription food effort to a machinists training program.

But almost all the programs have been aimed at Wayne County, where there are more low income people considered nutritionally "at risk." Focus:HOPE pondered moving into Oakland County but didn't act until this year when area residents approached the organization.

"Wayne County was the place that kept asking for help," said Edna Jackson, food prescription program director.

"But with the rise in unemployment in Oakland County, there's now a need for us to be there."

MOVING INTO OAKLAND took Focus:HOPE a year of planning. Now operating three centers and a central warehouse, the organization needed permission from the federal government to purchase additional food from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Instrumental in getting the approval

were U.S. Reps. J. Robert Traxler, D-Bay City; M. Robert Carr, D-E. Lansing, who represents Pontiac; and William Broomfield, R-Birmingham.

Members of Christ Church Cranbrook in Bloomfield Hills have been heavily involved in the effort, collecting signatures on petitions and now helping with the feeding program.

"It was a year's struggle with petitions and letters," recalled Josaltis, who received word in September that the effort was successful. "But we've been very optimistic because so many good will people are behind it."

The Food Prescription Program offers nutrition packages designed especially for pregnant women, preschoolers and senior citizens. Included in the month's supply are canned fruit and vegetables, meat, dry milk, cheese and infant formula.

Food for the Elderly provides USDA food to senior citizens living in Oakland, Macomb and Wayne counties. Designed to head off chronic malnutrition, it is one of three national pilot projects.

Recipients are referred by social

service agencies and health care agencies to Focus:HOPE, which makes the food available between 11 a.m. and 7:30 p.m. at the Pontiac location.

The centers also have on hand information on nutrition and how to prepare the food. A staff person is available to answer questions from recipients.

"We found a lot of people just didn't know what to do with the food when they got it," explained Jackson, adding that items like farina and powdered milk were new to some of the women. "So we've been able to share with them ways to fix things."

The next step for Focus:HOPE will probably be into western Wayne County, probably in Taylor. The organization would also like to expand the mother/child program into Macomb, which now distributes food to seniors.

"We're being asked to move further downriver where some steel mills have closed," said Josaltis.

"Our goal is to provide consistency. We want to make sure food is there for families that need it."

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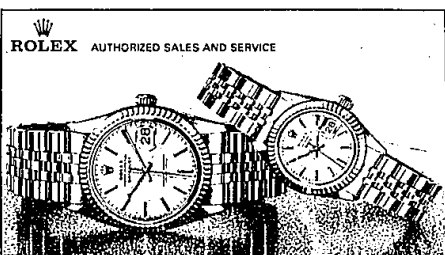
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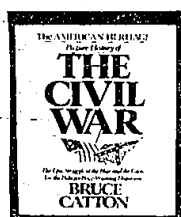
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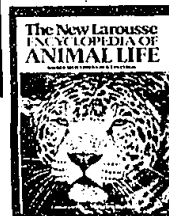
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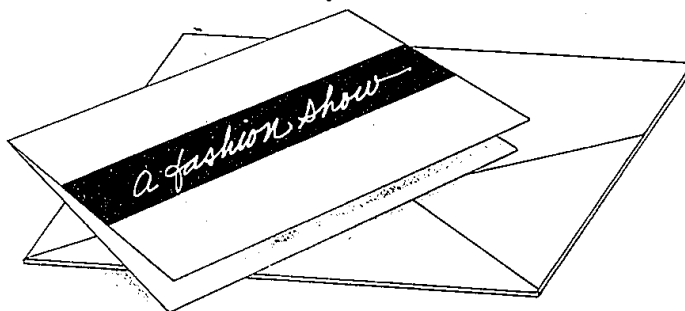


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