

Suburban Life

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Carrier Alert

Letter carriers and city department join in program of concern for the isolated

By Loraine McClish
staff writer

Carrier Alert, a nationwide program of concern for the elderly, the homebound, and the handicapped begins in Farmington and Farmington Hills the first week in December.

"Filled up mail is one of the first signs that something is wrong; that there is some irregularity in the life of those who live alone," said John Sapelak, a postal carrier with a Farmington Hills route who took the initiative to get the program started here.

"It's also a program that is a natural for the mail carrier, an extension of the care we've traditionally given for customers, not just in delivery of their mail, but in genuine concern for their well being. I know I consider customers on my route as friends, and I know those whose health or advanced age requires a little something extra."

As chairman-coordinator for the mail carriers' all-volunteer program, Sapelak will work to carry out Carrier Alert in cooperation with Joyce Messink, who is Farmington Hills Senior Adult Center's administrator for the program.

PERSONS INTERESTED in receiving the service must fill out an applica-

tion form that is filed by Messink, which carries the names of persons to be contacted in the case of emergency.

If the mail carrier spots an accumulation of mail or any other sign of irregularity, the senior adult center staff investigates in cooperation with the local police and fire departments.

The application must be on file for the program to work because, in part, it serves as permission for the investigators to enter the private home.

Local postman will leave an application form in all mail boxes that receive Social Security checks the first of next month.

Application forms are also available for those who have their Social Security checks deposited direct to their banks; for adult children whose parents are unable to fill out a form for any reason; and for the handicapped or homebound who may be missed in the distribution.

The forms can be picked up in Farmington Hills Parks and Recreation Department on 11 Mile and Orchard Lake Road. Or one will be sent on request by calling the department, 474-6115, Ext. 285.

IN LARGE MEASURE Carrier Alert serves as one more backup to "Telephone Reassurance," a program that's been in effect for about two years



John Sapelak and Joyce Messink will work together to carry out the new program for those who live alone in Farmington and Farmington Hills. Sapelak is coordinator of Carrier Alert for the local letter carriers. Messink will administrate the program through Farmington Hills Parks and Recreation Department's Senior Adult Center.



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

through Farmington Hills Senior Adult Center.

Yvonne Singer heads this program where daily calls are made to the isolated who need a daily contact as a means of protection.

"All we ask is if everything is OK," Singer said. "If we don't get an answer, we keep calling until we do, or we go over and investigate. What Carrier Alert will do is give one more check, plus we are going to be able to keep tabs on a lot more people who don't want to be tied down to the phone for a daily call."

All of the persons who are on the telephone-reassurance list have committed themselves to telling the callers before hand when they will be on vacation or away from the house for any reason.

The calls have proved themselves beneficial for the protection of some. The callers even have a few life-saving stories to tell.

Other times, a full investigation has been launched which unearthed only that the party involved had neglected to inform the callers of their whereabouts for that day.

"We know pretty well when these people have their hair done or what church service they attend, but that can vary, and we get excited when we aren't told," Singer said.

Sapelak described Carrier Alert as "an extra eye."

CARRIER ALERT is endorsed by Postmaster Ken Harris, Anita Guzik,

president of Branch 4570 of National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC) and "100 percent of the branch NALC membership," Sapelak said.

Farmington Hills Parks and Recreation Department is the sponsoring agent, represented by Doug Gaynor, director of special services, and Loretta Conway, senior adult supervisor.

Messink, an intern at the center working for her mental health degree at Oakland Community College, has personal reasons for volunteering for the job of heading up the administrative end of Carrier Alert.

"I had a neighbor who was found lying on her floor by a letter carrier, and I'll never forget it," Messink said. "She was a friend to everyone on the block who knew she was sick but believed she was on her way to getting better. With a telephone reassurance call or the Carrier Alert program in action we might have reached her before it was too late."

In reading the first news releases on the Carrier Alert program, Sapelak related stories of letter carriers who had come across much the same thing and had gone into action "before it was too late."

Singer related similar stories where telephone reassurance had averted tragedy "by going into action within minutes," she said.

A stroll through the past

Meadow Brook Hall opens its doors for a Victorian Christmas

Imagine a gift laden Christmas tree stretching toward a ceiling in a room that looks as if it belongs in an English country house.

Imagine stockings hung on a massive mantelpiece—just waiting to be plucked down on Christmas morning.

It's Christmas time at Meadow Brook Hall again.

Although visitors who take the 13th annual Christmas Walk at the hall won't see an exact replica of the holidays as its owner Matilda Dodge Wilson and her family knew it, strollers can still enjoy some pretty lavish decorating.

This year's theme, "A Victorian Christmas," promises to bring out enough porcelain dolls, old toys and bouquets of holly to satisfy any Ghost of Christmas Past.

More than 40 flower and specialty shops will decorate the hall this year for the walk which begins on Wednesday, Nov. 20, and continues until Sunday, Dec. 11. After opening day, the

hall's extended hours allow visitors to drop in from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Admission for weekday tours is \$5; weekend tours are \$6. Adults over 64, children under 19, students and Oakland University affiliates can tour for \$4 any day of the week. Groups of 20 or more can browse through the hall for \$4 per person if they make reservations.

KNOLE COTTAGE, built as a \$10 million scaled-down playhouse for young Frances Dodge, can be toured for \$1.

Greenhouse tours are 50 cents. Food service will be available in the Carriage House and gift boutiques are set up in the old Staff Quarters.

For those who really want to drink in the atmosphere of the holidays among the early auto and lumber magnates, Meadow Brook offers a by reservation only patrons dinner on Thursday through Saturday, Dec. 1-3. Tickets are \$75 per person with \$50 considered a

tax deductible donation. Cocktails and hors d'oeuvres are served at 7:30 p.m.

Dinner is served at 8:30 p.m.

Proceeds from the walk and dinner go toward maintaining the hall in the style to which it was accustomed.

The first year of the walk, 4,000 people filed through the hall, putting \$17,000 into the preservation budget. In recent years, an average of 10,000 people visit the hall during the holidays.

Each year, the event raises about \$100,000 for Meadow Brook's preservation. Funds for its preservation are in addition to the hall's yearly operating budget of \$500,000.

While the event can't repeat the Wilson's holiday practices, the walk has taken its visitors through several fanciful themes: Christmas Around the World, Christmas Carols, The 12 Days of Christmas and A Fairy Tale Christmas.

Completed in 1929 at a cost of \$4 million, the country home of Alfred and Matilda Dodge Wilson borrows heavily from the designs of English estates. The couple visited several with their home's architect, William Kapp while planning their home.

Originally, Mrs. Wilson was to have lived in a Grosse Pointe mansion with her first husband, John Dodge, one of Detroit's early auto magnates. But his death halted work on the mansion which languished half-completed for several years while the widow pondered over its fate.

Her marriage in 1925 was followed by preliminary planning for a mansion in the Rochester area. In later years, the lavishness of the home's design was matched by the scope of its family's entertaining.

BUT FOR a family gathering like Christmas, the agenda was kept relatively simple. A tree large enough to scrape the ceiling stood in the living room and stockings hung from the fireplace mantel. Mrs. Wilson, herself is said to have delighted in choosing the family's Christmas trees from the property surrounding the hall.

Both the entrance and servants' hall had their own Christmas trees, although these were smaller. Flowers and greens decorated the rooms and the dining room bay window was bright with poinsettias.

On Christmas morning, the family had breakfast at 9 a.m. followed by the arrival of Santa Claus, usually played by an employee.

The late afternoon dinner of turkey with all the trimmings was followed by the appearance of a small Santa and sleigh displayed on the dining room table.

Inside the sleigh were presents. The children pulled a string attached to the present and dragged out a small gift, such as pens, charms, watches and jewelry.

Employees were remembered with a personal gift, a turkey or a poinsettia. The Wilsons reportedly sent out 1,500 Christmas cards.



DAVID FRANK/staff photographer



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Visitors to the hall will be greeted by Charles Thornton, who is now known as the hall's resident toy soldier. He's played the part for the last several seasons and says the role is one he enjoys.

There are so many trees in the hall to be prepared for the visitors that trimming them has almost become a full-time job for the volunteers.

Other decorating is being done now by people from 40 flower and specialty shops.