

Vietnam vet tells about homelessness

By Susan Buck
staff writer

Homeless Vietnam veteran Charles Winter tried for three years to get Supplementary Security Income (SSI) benefits.

Because he is illiterate, Winter, 43, does not have the skills to pursue or follow up on his own application. And because he lives near a Lansing highway in a small tent bought with money he collected from cans and scrap metal, Winter never received any paperwork.

"The only time that I've ever been employed was back when I was 17 years old," said Winter. "At that time, I dropped out of school without knowing how to read or write. I took on some odd jobs at the grocery store and some factory work, but nothing ever lasted too long. After jumping from job to job, I enlisted in the Army and was sent to Vietnam. This is where my troubles began."

When I was honorably discharged from the service, I was a full-blown alcoholic."

Winter's plight finally reached the attention of Sen. Donald Riegle, D-Flint, who is promoting introduction of the Homeless Outreach Bill of 1990.

IF ENACTED, the bill would require the Social Security Administration (SSA) to reach out to the blind, disabled and elderly in soup kitchens, shelters and day centers and teach them about benefits to which they are entitled, but may not know about.

"Under the Supplemental Security Income program (SSI), these people whose incomes are substantially below the federal poverty level, may receive benefits — up to \$386 per month for individuals," Riegle said. "It is estimated that among the homeless in this country about 25 percent suffer from mental disabilities."

ty, 10 percent are physically disabled and 20 percent are elderly."

Homelessness has been an issue in Wayne County, where officials recently authorized a county-sponsored shelter. It has also been an issue in Oakland County where church groups have held vigils for the homeless.

Winter was joined at the hearing by Sherry Brantley, a former homeless and physically abused wife with three daughters under age 7, and Thomas Rybinski of Detroit, a laid-off General Motors Detroit Hamtramck auto plant worker who got caught up in a bureaucratic maze of GM recalls rights.

The three headed the agenda at a banking, housing and urban affairs committee hearing on homelessness chaired by Riegle March 26 at Morcy College in Detroit.

It is estimated that as many as 90,000 people in Michigan are homeless — 15,000 are children. The fastest growing segment of the homeless population are women and children, according to those who provide ser-

vices to the homeless. There are more than 100 homeless shelters in Michigan.

According to Riegle, the state of Michigan provided \$500,000 for homeless assistance in 1989. Michigan has quadrupled its funding level this year by appropriating \$2 million in homeless assistance for fiscal year 1990.

"AS WE continue the search for ways to address the issue of homelessness, as well as the need for affordable housing, I feel it is important to hear from those who are most directly affected by the enactment of such legislation," Riegle said.

Sara Snyder, 39, executive director of Grateful Home, a center for chemically dependent indigent women in Detroit, also testified. She was a homeless alcoholic in 1974, now recovered.

"I remember people walking past me and not being seen, somehow invisible," Snyder said. "I remember speaking to people and having them ignore me as if my voice made no

sound. I remember standing outside homes after darkness came and watching people move about in those lighted rooms and wishing I could go in and be with them, and yet knowing there was not one door that would open for me. I felt unseen, unheard, unwanted and unimportant."

Last August, Riegle formed a special homelessness task force to help evaluate how effectively the issue of homelessness is being addressed. The task force conducted meetings in 26 communities throughout the State to seek the input of 400 local citizens to see how the federal government is responding to needs. The Senate Housing Committee has jurisdiction over many of the housing programs authorized under the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act of 1987 which was a key

step in the effort by Congress to address the needs of homeless people. In 1988, the Act was re-authorized by Congress. More than \$14.5 million of federal homeless assistance was provided to Michigan in 1989 through the McKinney Homeless Assistance Act.

In addition to the McKinney Act, there are approximately 60 other federal programs that provide a small amount of homeless assistance.

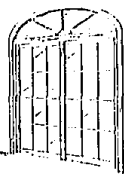
"Housing legislation is a top priority of the committee this year," Riegle said. "In fact, we are scheduled to mark-up the National Affordable Housing Act in our committee on May 2. The National Affordable Housing Act will modify and strengthen the McKinney programs and increase housing assistance for homeless people."

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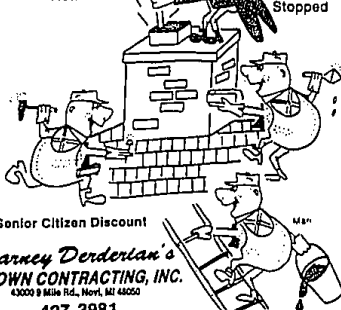
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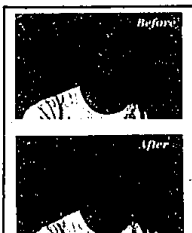
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A public service message of this publication and Selective Service System.

Teens named for academies

Twenty local students have been nominated from the 18th Congressional District for appointments to the service academies.

Nominees are selected on the basis of SAT/ACT scores, scholastic record, leadership potential, extracurricular activities, and recommendations.

Local nominees are:
Air Force Academy: Charles Chuba and Neil McNabney of Farmington Hills; Marvin Ee, West Bloomfield; Mark S. Mitchell of Farmington; Rebecca Preston and Alex Ramos of Troy; Matthew Ridsdale of Rochester Hills; Christopher Korn-

messer of Birmingham; and Gordon Limb of Union Lake.

Naval Academy: Bernard Butting of Bloomfield Hills; Paul Judge of Rochester Hills; Ian Levine of Farmington Hills; Ian MacLennan of Union Lake; and Elizabeth Fuger of Birmingham.

The Military Academy: Adrian Perica of Rochester Hills; Leah Nelson of West Bloomfield; Slavy Buchesky and Eric Brukwinski of Troy; Kurt Rillema of Birmingham; and J.C. Eric Crawford, III of Farmington.

Final appointments to the academies will be made by selection boards at each academy.

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