Oakland shelters meet homeless needs - for now

BY WAYNE PEAL
STAFF WRITER

The good news — Oakland County stands ready to help the homeless.

The bad news — the county's homeless problem isn't getting any better.

"We're running just about neck-and-neck with last year," said Robert Locey, chairman of the county task force on homelessness and affordable housing.

And 1991 saw a dramatic increase in the number of homeless county residents.

County shelters admitted 25 percent more people last year, compared with 1990, according to a just-released county report.

Much of the rise was attributed to the state's termination of general assistance for able bodied males.

More than 2,100 people were housed in the eight registered county shelters, countless more in make-shift church shelters, Locey said.

Even that figure doesn't provide a true picture of county homelessness.

Nearly 1,400 people were turned away from county-approved shelters for a variety of reasons, including substance abuse, psychiatric ailments, severe medical problems or discipline problems.

Despite that, Locey believes the county system is working.

Though it has no shelter of its own, the county supports a series of private shelters in Pontiac and Royal Oak.

Some, like the Pontiac Rescue Mission, provide temporary shelter. Others, like Pontiac Area Transitional Housing, provide programming to improve social and job skills.

"These transitional shelters are a very important part of our plan," Locey said.

Two shelters, PATH and HAVEN, are specifically geared toward women. Two more, The Sanctuary and A Step Forward, are geared toward teenagers and children.

Other shelters include the South Oakland and the Baldwin shelters, which provide temporary housing, and the Women's Survival Center, which provides transitional programs as well as shelter.

The county program's weakness, Locey acknowledges, is that there are no shelters specifically geared to men.

"It is something we hope to work on," he said.

Nearly 60 percent of those registered at county shelters are males, according to 1991 statistics. That figure, however, includes children who — as a group — account for two of every five homeless county residents.

To no one's great surprise, more than 70 percent of the homeless were also unemployed, but about 15 percent had at least a part-time job.

Locey said the county is sufficiently equipped to meet current needs.

"We saw the cutoff in general assistance coming and we prepared for it," he said.

But he added the county could be pressed if homelessness rises.

"People need to keep contributing to shelters," he said. "The need is still there."

Auto dealer named to take Googasian's OU board seat

BY PAT MURPHY
STAFF WRITER

A Republican has been appointed, and a Democrat reappointed to the Oakland University Board of Trustees by Gov. John Engler.

The Republican is David Fischer, president of Suburban Motors, Ind., of Bloomfield Hills. The Democrat is James A. Sharp Jr., vice president of Community Development and Government Affairs for City Management Corp., who lives in Detroit.

Fischer replaces Phyllis Law Googasian, whose term expired last Tuesday.

Sharp, a former mayor of Flint, essentially replaces himself. He was appointed to the OU board in 1988 by Gov. James Blanchard, and his term also expired last Tuesday.

"Both bring a proven record of dynamic leadership in the public and private sectors," Engler said in a press release last week.

Following his first board meeting Wednesday, Fischer said he was "excited" about his appointment.

David Fischer

James A. Sharp Jr.

"The future of the United States is linked to our educational system," said Fischer, a 1964 graduate of Bloomfield Hills High School. "And I'm happy to be part of Oakland University."

He attended Parsons College in Iowa where he received a bachelor's degree in business administration.

"Most of my life has been in the car industry," said Fischer, whose dealerships sell a wide range of automobiles — both domestic and foreign.

Fischer is on the board of directors for the Detroit Auto Dealers Association and was involved in the decision to expand Detroit's auto show.

Sharp is considered one of the front runners when the OU board selects a new chairman next month.

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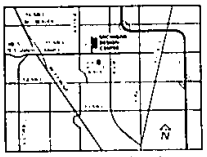

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