

SUBURBAN LIFE

C

THURSDAY, MARCH 31, 1994



ARLENE FRANK

Womencenter is an anchor

Women helping women . . . Louise came to the doors of the Womencenter several times. She always stopped at the doors, peering in, then quickly turned and left. One day she walked tentatively through the doors and for a brief moment stood close to them inside the room. Slowly, but with determination, Louise stepped farther and farther into the Womencenter. When she finally sat at the big table in the middle of the room, she had clearly accomplished a personal goal. She spoke very little, and when she did her voice was barely audible. As she returned time and again her voice became louder and stronger.

The Womencenter at the Orchard Ridge Campus of Oakland Community College is always a welcome place for women to sit and talk.

In a society that has not traditionally listened to or valued women's voices, we at the Womencenter listen and we encourage women to overcome the oppression of their silences. We hear many voices - sad, joyous, conflicted, resolved.

The Womencenter originally formed and continues to exist and grow because of the multiple needs of women on the campus and in the community. Women are an isolated and divided group in society. We are isolated in families and divided by economic stratas, by color and minority status and by age.

Individually and alone, the voice of woman is mute. Collectively, the voices of women gain audibility and audience. On campus, the Womencenter has been a place where women come to express their interest, to share their ideas and to find support in their daily struggles against the consequences of class, color, age, sexual orientation and gender discrimination.

Although our services are designed primarily to address the concerns of women, many of our services are open and available to all members of the campus and community.

Women helping women . . . Susan has divorced. She has lingering doubt she doesn't feel settled, she wants to talk about feelings. She reads about the Divorce Support Group at the Womencenter. With other women, she can express her feelings, gain information, discuss common issues, share and learn from other women's experiences. Now, Susan knows she has options and the resources to exercise them.

The Womencenter offers a variety of supportive groups led by both professionals and peers. Through the years, the Womencenter has developed a varied and comprehensive referral system for attorneys, domestic violence shelters and services, career and education services, access to counselors and therapists and many other services.

We also offer support groups; seminars and workshops on a wide range of subjects concerning women; a one-on-one confidential peer counseling service; and a monthly legal clinic. Once a year, we sponsor a dynamic women's art show entitled "Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow: Women in Art." With the Women's Resource Center and Health Service at Schoolcraft College, we hold an annual informative women's health conference entitled "A Call to Wholeness: A Women's Health Agenda for the '90s."

Women helping women . . . Millie returned to school after her children were older. She took courses at Oakland Community College toward her goal of teaching. The Womencenter became her refuge - a place to relax between classes, a place for emotional support and when she became ill the Womencenter became one of her lifelines. After Millie's death, the Womencenter was remembered by her family and friends as a source of inspiration and support.

The Womencenter was birthed 21 years ago to meet the needs of women on the campus and in the community. Women students, faculty and staff came together to celebrate International Women's Day. The success of that organizing spurred a desire to build a permanent, visible center. The Womencenter's purpose isn't to tell women what to do. We help women by giving information on options and alternatives and then by encouraging women to decide what feels appropriate and comfortable.

Our staff at the Womencenter consists of Patti Briggs, director as well as academic counselor at the college, and myself, Arlene Frank, program coordinator. We also have college interns from area colleges and universities, work-study students, and several priceless volunteers. We work closely with the Career and Transfer Center on the campus, often directing women with career issues, or women who are beginning or continuing their educational pursuits.

Staff, community agencies and therapists refer clients to us to use our services and groups.

We are located in J Building, Room 808 on the Orchard Ridge Campus and are open 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Thursday. Our phone number is 471-7602. We welcome your participation. Add your voice to our many-hued and life-textured tapestry of voices.

We are women helping women.
Arlene Frank, Oakland Community College,
Orchard Ridge Campus, is Womencenter program coordinator.



JIM JACHTHELYN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

In stitches: Karen McDermott of Garden City (right) and Bonnie Bentley of Farmington meet half way, so to speak, by opening their custom bridal shop, Bonnie's Bridal, in Livonia.

Pins and needles: A fitting job



Bonnie Bentley and Karen McDermott have lives filled with pins and needles. The reason being their ability to create custom clothing for weddings, proms, costume parties and the like.

BY SUE MASON
STAFF WRITER

You could say Bonnie Bentley is a speed demon of sorts. Seated in front of her Singer sewing machine, its clacky-clack sounds more like a roar as the needle dances across a piece of white satin, destined to be the collar of a pink bridesmaid's dress.

All done? Bam. The needle stops dead in its tracks.

This isn't your average portable home sewing machine, and Bentley isn't your average seamstress. Hers is a commercial machine she uses to ply her trade - custom dress designs at Bonnie's Bridal in Livonia.

Partner Karen McDermott prefers the Singer home sewing machine. "I've been dreaming about this for a long time," Bentley said of the new shop. "I worked at home for 10 years and took up almost half of my home with a sewing room, fitting and changing rooms. My husband is so glad I'm out."

"I gave up a lucrative career (doing direct sales) to work with

Bonnie," McDermott said with a chuckle.

They opened the shop in the Village Fashion Mall on Merriman north of Seven Mile in mid-December and being one of the few shops in the area that does custom work, they've been busy ever since.

The two women decided to tackle a shop of their own when they "got wind" that the owner of a bridal shop in the mall was retiring. They inquired into purchasing the business but eventually decided to wait until that shop had closed before opening their own business.

"We learned a lot about business in three days," McDermott said. "We had to make a lot of decisions, and I don't think we made a bad one."

Working relationship

McDermott, a Garden City resident, first met Bentley, who lives in Farmington, when she worked at a bridal shop with Bentley's mother. The two women met, and Bentley ended up working for McDermott for awhile. Their roles reversed when

Bentley started working out of her home, with McDermott working for her for six years.

Bentley's interest in sewing dates back to high school. In fact she credits her sewing teacher Darlene Marohnic at Livonia Churchill High School with inspiring her to become a professional dressmaker. After winning the Hudson's Teen Sewing Contest and attending Eastern Michigan University, Bentley went on to perfect her skills working at bridal shops and out of her home.

McDermott's inspiration was closer to home - her mother. A seamstress, McDermott recalls her mother was always sewing at home. She learned a lot, so much so, that whatever else she needed she picked up during her first year of high school. After that, she "actually taught" the freshman sewing class her junior and senior years.

"I also (later) had three children, and I learned that sewing at home was very economical," McDermott said. "And when people heard I liked sewing at home, like the manager of a store, started doing all kinds of sewing at home."

Their work can be seen in every corner of the 1,700-square foot shop - a wedding dress encrusted with crystal beadwork, a white cowboy hat decorated with ribbons,

flowers and silver studs for a western theme wedding and four pastel-colored halter dresses destined for a cruise ship wedding.

And then there are the prom dresses.

"The prom girls are fun," said McDermott working on the cowboy hat. "They get carried away then have to ask their Mom if they can wear it. Then the Mom comes in and redesigns it."

Seissor magic

Bentley makes her own patterns for the custom clothing. Sometimes, her clients bring in photographs of dresses, wanting the top from one and the bottom from the other. She also provides silhouettes so they can draw what they would like the dress to look.

"Sometimes, I just cut right on the material; other times I make a paper pattern, if I think it's something that will stay in style for awhile," she said. "I think with our business, people are surprised that custom-made is no more expensive than ready-to-wear."

It takes the duo about an hour to cut out and assemble a bridesmaid's dress for fitting. That's without a zipper and buttons and the finishing

See PINS, 2C

Students host lunch to feed the hungry

BY DIANE GALE
STAFF WRITER

Students Against Hunger, a group from the Enrichment Center at Oakland Community College's Orchard Ridge campus, gave away empty bowls recently as a reminder that some people have nothing to eat.

The students hosted a bread and soup luncheon recently and invited guests to keep the ceramic bowl, donated by OCC art students.

"When you take the bowl back home and when you see it, it reminds you that someone's bowl is always empty," according to Joan Kuskak, of the Enrichment Center.

The soup and bread was provided by OCC culinary arts students. The bowls were gone in one hour. Other guests, however, made their donation and settled for soup in plastic bowls. The luncheon earned \$460, Kuskak said.

The money will be used to help feed hungry people in Detroit.

Students and community volunteers meet the first Saturday of the month at 8 a.m. in the faculty parking lot and go to St. Leo's Soup

Kitchen on Grand River at 14th Street in southwest Detroit. They prepare meals for 100 to 200 people.

Volunteers have been going to the soup kitchen for five years.

"Everytime we ask the community to help we get an overwhelming response," according to Roger Hedglen, a Students Against Hunger member.

Pat Eastwood of Farmington joined her daughter, Ann Tuross of Farmington Hills, at the luncheon. Eastwood, an active volunteer, was considering taking part in the St.

Leo's Soup Kitchen program.

Daniel Rowison, OCC chef instructor made the cream of broccoli soup and Chris Galli, OCC baking instructor made the anadama, five grain, bread.

"We don't try to solve the world's problems," Kuskak said. "We just try to bring some smiles on peoples' faces."

Some of the OCC student volunteers included Amy Enright, Eugenia Ballard and Silvia Rankin. For more information on volunteering at the St. Leo's Soup Kitchen call 471-7693.

Modest volunteer comforts afflicted

BY DIANE GALE
STAFF WRITER

Victoria Spehar doesn't like to draw attention to the painstaking work that goes into handmade quilts she donates to various organizations. But that doesn't stop her friends from talking.

"She's a dedicated person," said Angie Giffels, who volunteers with Spehar in the ICON DEI guild, which supports Guest House for recovering alcoholic priests.

"She's a modest and humble person and she's very giving," Giffels said. "She does very nice things in a quiet way."

This is the 10th year Spehar will be donating a quilt to be raffled for the Guest House. Spehar, a Farmington resident, said it is unfortunate that priests receive such bad publicity.

"But everyone has problems," she said. "And this program is successful in rehabilitating a large percentage of priests who return to their parishes."

While her admired work has adorned homes of strangers, Spehar has never made a quilt for herself.

"But, I don't need it," she said. "I have what I need on my bed."

She spends hundreds of hours stitching the pieces of material together to make various styles, such as the wedding ring, maple leaf and sampler.

"Her quilts each year are more beautiful than the previous year and it would be an honor to win one," Giffels said. "She puts a lot of love into it."

Spehar, who taught herself how to quilt, said the sewing talent may have come from her mother or who was a dressmaker. At one time, in fact, Spehar found time to make her own clothes.

See VOLUNTEER, 3C