

COMMUNITY LIFE

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Sarah Fisher campaign launched

■ Cardinal Adam Maida will dedicate the first new cottage in January.



BY MARY RODRIQUE
STAFF WRITER

In its first ever capital campaign, the St. Vincent and Sarah Fisher Center of Farmington Hills is attempting to raise \$4 million for renovations to the cottages that house 60 children in its residential treatment program.

"Ground was broken back in 1929 with money from the Charles and Sarah Fisher family. It was an orphanage originally operated by the Daughters of Charity," said Sallie Justice, community relations coordinator. "We've dubbed this campaign Today's Orphans."

Today's residents are wards of the state due to severe abuse and neglect. The population of abused children has more than doubled in the past ten years and shows no signs of slowing down, Justice said.

Already well underway, the first new cottage will be unveiled Jan. 21, 1997 when Cardinal Adam Maida presides over a dedication ceremony. Like the others that will follow over the next two years, St. Catherine's cottage will feature individual bedrooms for each child, replacing the current six shared bedrooms, private showering rooms, and a more centralized location for staff. Ten children per cottage will be the new ratio, replacing the current 12 resident limit per cottage.

The children who call the cottages home come from metro Detroit and range in age from 4 to 17. They represent many races and religions. A chapel in the administrative wing of the complex, which is connected by hallways with the cottages, holds non-denominational church services each Sunday.

The average length of stay is 18 months, but Justice recently talked to a former resident who lived there for five years.

They split about evenly between boys and girls. Cottages are divided by sex and more or less grouped by age. The common thread the children share is that most have been victims of abuse. Some are allowed outings with their family, some are not, depending on the order of the court.

Many demonstrate self-destructive



Construction Zone: Sallie Justice shows off the first new cottage at the St. Vincent and Sarah Fisher Center in Farmington Hills while carpenter Rich Kallman of Lydon Construction works behind her.

STAFF PHOTO BY SHARON LAMBERT

behavior and have severe learning and behavioral problems, Justice said. The programs at the center involve youth specialists, tutors and nurses working together in a heavily structured environment and individual, group and family therapy.

Half the children attend the Farmington Public Schools while the other half attend school on the grounds. That program, created last year, offers elementary, middle and high school curriculums staffed by Farmington school teachers and support staff. Each incoming resident attends school there for a month to give teachers time to make a proper evaluation for placement.

"When the renovation is complete, every child will have his own bedroom, which is important for their privacy and safety," said Justice, presiding over a tour of the sprawling complex at the corner of Twelve Mile and Inkster roads. "More common room will allow a family to visit with more privacy."

In a recent newsletter, John Buehner, the center's director of

support services, noted that "the changes are more than cosmetic. The facilities committee, staff and architect have carefully developed plans to support the treatment needs of the children who require additional privacy due to their backgrounds of severe abuse."

Already, \$2.1 million has been raised through individual gifts and a \$450,000 United Way community services capital fund program.

The old cottages show signs of their advanced age, from the weathered windows to the lackluster interiors. The beds and other sparse furnishings look old and worn. Although neat and clean, the cottages have a tired institutional look.

Upgrading the heating system and adding energy efficient windows are also planned.

"We're adding air conditioning," said Justice. "It's not really a luxury when you consider 10 kids per cottage and the sweltering heat we sometimes get in summer."

Even with the scattered litter of construction in progress, St. Catherine's

cottage is like a breath of fresh air. Its walls are a soothing blue, corridors seem airier, more open. No doubt its first residents next year will feel uplifted.

Last year, the residential treatment program provided 109 children with 24 hour care and over 28 children were discharged to a less restrictive setting.

Its foster care program served 153 children, licensed 8 new foster parents and provided counseling and support to 70 foster families caring for special needs children. It operates these and several other programs on a \$6 million budget, the bulk of which is generated from program service fees.

No monies from the annual Garden Party and Jazz. Benefits will be used for the capital campaign. Those funds are used for operations, Justice said.

Donations to the capital campaign will be accepted at the St. Vincent and Sarah Fisher Center, 27400 W. 12 Mile Rd., Farmington Hills, MI 48334.



DON FRADETTE

From public safety to softball, Chuck Lee is model sportsman

I have known Charles Lee for over 20 years and it has been a privilege to be associated with such a fine person. Many of you know him as Commander Lee of the Farmington Department of Public Safety.

Others know him simply as Chuck, a softball enthusiast. He is a fierce competitor and winning is very important, yet the spirit of fair play and sportsmanship is the true life force for this special individual.

During his sports career, he has done it all, from playing just about every position on the field to team manager. Chuck is always ready to help and never too busy to offer guidance to fellow players.

It is always an adventure to play against Chuck. He loves to talk to opposing batters about everything from soup to nuts. If you're in the batter's box, he will start a conversation and the next thing you know, you're out!

This is great to watch because anyone that has played the sport has to laugh as the spider draws the fly into his web. Don't get me wrong, this is all done in good taste and when it does not work, he is the first to congratulate you on a good hit.

On Oct. 12, 1996, at Founder's Park, the Sister City Softball Tournament was held for the eighth year. And yes, you guessed it, the spider was at work again. I watched him personally talk ten batters into making outs with his patented routine. It was amazing, he even had some batters talking about breakfast while batting.

This tournament is only designed for fun and to be completely fair. Chuck has gone the whole nine yards. Although winning is very important, he has kept the true spirit of the tournament alive. Over the years, other players have not understood this purity, some players think win at all costs and cut throat is the only way to play. We all know someone like that. Well, over the years, Chuck's teams may have lost a game or two but as we all know, it's better to lose and have fun than to win and make everyone miserable.

At the end of the tournament, Farmington

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Do you belong to a club or organization you'd like to tell the community about? Or just have an interesting story to share? Consider writing a column for the community life section of the Farmington Observer. Call 477-5450 for more information.

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