

Food bank makes plea for holiday donations

BY RENA FULKA
SPECIAL WRITER

When Helen Kozlowski sizes up the staples in the Food Bank of Oakland County's three warehouses, she sees little in the way of holiday fare for the 117 emergency food distribution agencies she serves.

That means the upcoming holidays may not be so cheerful for many of the 65,000 Oakland County residents who depend on the supplements to stave off hunger.

"The agencies want holiday food and that's not the kind of food that's usually donated here," said Kozlowski, the Food Bank's executive director. "We will make sure when Johnny sits down on Christmas Day that he will be fed, even if it's a hot dog. But we like Johnny to have the same kind of memories we all have of steaming turkey, cranberry

sauce and stuffing."

Since 1985, the Pontiac-based Food Bank of Oakland County has been providing food and personal care items on a regular basis through a network of emergency food pantries, soup kitchens and shelters in a scattering of communities that today include Birmingham, Bloomfield Hills, Rochester and Southfield. There is no charge to the agencies for food beyond a 12-cent per pound maintenance fee. The organization is also affiliated with the Food Bank Council of Michigan, Detroit-based Hunger Action Coalition of Michigan, Gleaners Community Food Bank in Detroit and Chicago-based Second Harvest National Food Bank Network in a joint effort to alleviate hunger among the needy.

"What really concerns me is that there is a perception that there is no hunger in Oakland County," said Kozlowski, who spent five years as development director at the Pontiac-based Baldwin Soup Kitchen before assuming her role at the Food Bank in June. "In Oakland County, there are pockets of streets where the average income for a family is less than \$11,000 a year."

Though figures show that unemployment is low and welfare caseloads are down, many individuals who have shed government assistance are currently laboring at low-paying jobs that don't support their basic needs.

"The poverty line is \$6.50 an hour," said Nida Donar, Hunger Action Coalition's executive director. "And when we're paying people \$6.75, they're guaranteed to stay in poverty."

Food stamp restrictions, begun earlier this year as part of the federal welfare reform law, have become a new hardship that has sent more families into the throes of hunger.

"We're seeing in the first eight

months of this year a 27 percent increase of people coming to pantries," said Donar, a former Birmingham resident who now resides in Detroit. "Most people coming to pantries are families. And 70 percent of the children of these families are living at 60 percent below the poverty level."

But poor families and the homeless aren't the only ones in a crisis situation as far as hunger goes. "What we find is that anywhere there are seniors, there's a hunger problem. It's the silent hunger," said Donar, referring to the elderly on fixed incomes. "When you go into a senior's house, find an excuse to open the refrigerator door and you will be surprised that there's nothing there."

To help fill the growing need for food in Oakland County, the Food Bank relies on collection campaigns like the United States Postal Service Food Drive in May and the Boy Scouts of America sponsored Operation Can-Do in November, and donations from foundations, small businesses and corporations, churches and synagogues and caring individuals.

"Seventy percent of our support for emergency services comes from your readership area," said Donar, referring to contributors living in communities served by the Observer & Eccentric! Newspapers. "A lot of people become very successful in life, but started out somewhere else...with nothing in their refrigerator. At some point in life, they realize what's important. We're very fortunate that people who have made it realize that the goal here is helping others make it, too."

Also pertinent to successfully feeding the hungry is hundreds of volunteers throughout the network, from the warehouses to the distribution centers. Volunteers tend to find fulfillment in help-



Stocking up: Food Bank warehouse manager Steven Trevino of Clarkston finishes loading eggs in one of three storage areas.

ing others, much like the group of mentally and physically challenged teens who frequent the 20,400 square feet of warehouse space at 120 E. Columbia to sort food.

"They feel that they have been so fortunate that people have recognized their disabilities and have given them so much," said Kozlowski, a resident of St. Clair Shores. "They want to give back to those who truly need it."

Throughout the holiday season, the Food Bank staff is calling on Oakland County residents to help provide turkeys, yams, cranberries and other holiday meal trimmings for their less-

fortunate neighbors. "If you don't have a turkey to donate, don't buy one. We can get them for 65 cents a pound," said Kozlowski, who welcomes cash donations. "Every single person can do something. For every dollar donated, we can provide 8.5 meals."

Monetary contributions for holiday meals can be made payable to the Food Bank of Oakland County, 120 E. Columbia, Pontiac, MI 48343. Food donations can be made by calling the Food Bank directly at (248) 332-1473.



Helen Kozlowski, Food Bank director

Among the Oakland organizations distributing food to the needy on a regular basis are: TEAM Center in Birmingham; Birmingham Unitarian Church, Ladies of Charity, North Oakland Residential and St. Elizabeth's in Birmingham; CLC, Inc., Good Shepherd Assembly of God, Innovative Life Styles and Lighthouse in Clarkston; Farmington Hills Baptist Church, Mercy Services for Aging, Salvation Army and St. Alexander Roman Catholic Church in Farmington Hills. Also: Oxford Fish in Lake Orion; Good Neighbors, Inc., New Life Church of God, and Tribute to the Lord Ministries in Oxford; North Oakland YMCA in Rochester; Faith Loving Childcare, Jewish Association for Residential Care, Packard Group, Inc., St. Michael's Priory and Southfield Hamlet Mennonite Church, Open Door Outreach, Oxbow Lake Baptist Church and White Lake Goodfellows in White Lake.

Red Wings limo driver to spend 9 months in jail

BY PAT MURPHY
STAFF WRITER

The Detroit Red Wings paralyzed in a June limousine crash in Birmingham would likely think it "appropriate" that the limo driver will spend nine months in jail as part of his sentence, according to the attorney for Sergei Mnatsakanov.

"The sentence is severe enough to send a message," said attorney Frank J. Palazzolo, after the limo driver was sentenced by 48th District Judge Kimberly Small Friday.

His client has no particular animosity toward driver Richard A. Gnida — who told police he blacked out before the June 13, 1997 crash — said the attorney. But Mnatsakanov would likely consider the sentence to be "appropriate" as punishment and as a deterrent, the attorney said.

Gnida, 28, stood impassively as Small imposed sentence. He had told the judge and a courtroom packed with media that he was sorry for the pain and suffering resulting from the crash, but he couldn't change anything.

The judge said she was frustrated about sentencing Gnida because existing state law did not provide the options she considered necessary to adequately deal with him. "You shattered lives with your behavior," she said. "But you don't believe you have a problem with substance abuse."

Gnida had pleaded guilty to a charge of driving without a valid driver's license, but because it was a misdemeanor, the maximum penalty was one year in county jail.

Instead, Small sentenced Gnida to two years probation with the first nine months in the Oakland County Jail. After his release, Gnida is required to perform 200 hours of community service working with the victims of alcohol-related injuries.

"I want you to have to empty bed pans," said Small. "I want you to see what these people go through."

The judge also ordered Gnida to undergo extensive counseling to fully understand his substance abuse problem and the injuries he caused the limousine passengers who trusted him.

Small read from Gnida's traffic record, noting two alcohol-related arrests, one accident and three citations. "How much time have you spent in jail as a result



Driver sentenced: Richard Gnida (right) reacts to a jail sentence he received from District Judge Kimberly Small as his attorney, Frank J. Palazzolo looks on.

of these?" she asked.

After Gnida answered "about three weeks," the judge said a major concern was whether he would ever understand the law and his substance abuse.

You were told you couldn't drive, Small said, "yet you passed yourself off as a professional driver who could be trusted."

Oakland County assistant prosecutor Michael Sawicki asked for the maximum penalty, insisting "this was no ordinary accident, no ordinary case."

The case went beyond the ordinary, Sawicki said, because Gnida demonstrated contempt for the court, the law and his victims by repeatedly driving after his license was revoked.

Even so, Sawicki voiced acceptance on the sentence. "The judge believes the sentence is appropriate," he said.

Gnida was driving the limo that carried Mnatsakanov, Vladimir Konstantinov and Slava Fetisov from a golf outing to a party as part of the celebration following the Red Wings winning the Stanley Cup, professional hockey's greatest prize.

The southbound limo suddenly veered across three unobstructed lanes on Woodward Avenue and struck a tree.

Fetisov, who was sitting with his back to the driver, was injured and hospitalized for about a week. But the defense-

man is currently playing with the Red Wings.

Mnatsakanov and Konstantinov, who were not wearing seat belts and were seated facing the front of the vehicle, suffered extensive spinal or brain injuries, according to doctors at William Beaumont Hospital where they remain hospitalized.

"Mr. Mnatsakanov definitely considers himself to be a victim," his attorney told reporters. "And he has moments of frustration and despair."

But he is also grateful the injuries were not more serious, Mnatsakanov said in the victim's impact statement read by Palazzolo. "He's also grateful for the support from his family, friends and fans."

The attorney said additional court action is likely, presumably a reference to possible civil action. Gnida also has a careless driving charge in Birmingham.

A statement issued by Beaumont Hospital Friday said Konstantinov and Mnatsakanov were in good condition and continuing to show progress.

Contrary to earlier concerns — that he would never speak again — Konstantinov spoke the names of his wife Irina and daughter Anastasia last week, the hospital said. "He (Konstantinov) is able to perform daily activities with assistance from hospital staff and family members."

Neither Konstantinov nor his family responded to questions, relayed from the media, about their reaction to Gnida's sentencing.

One year later, judge keeps eye on campaign promises

Editor's note: We're re-running this story since some text was missing when it ran Thursday.

BY JUDITH DONER BERNE
SPECIAL WRITER

First-year Oakland County Circuit Judge Nanci Grant works hard to make the transition from civil trial attorney to judge look easy.

Elected a year ago to the vacancy created by the retirement of Judge Robert Templein, Grant promised preparedness, efficiency, civility and decisiveness during a hard-fought election campaign.

"I remember every day the promises I made when I was running," Grant says, during a recent interview in her chambers. "You don't have to be abrupt or rude to do this job. You do have to know what you are doing."

It's a Wednesday afternoon, and Grant sets an easy tone for the several cases she awaits hearing. She has no leftovers from the long line up of legal motions, she and other judges call each Wednesday morning.

"My motion calls go very quickly," she says. "I read them the night before so I'm very familiar. I'm usually done by 11 a.m. I've never gone past 12:01."

This day, a divorce case is settling. After hearing both parties agree to some financial terms, Grant comments: "I am well aware of the facts in this case. I congratulate the four of you (lawyers and clients) on working on this."

Next up is an agreement to settle a civil suit for \$9,500. "The court will approve the settlement," Grant says. "Good luck," she says, calling the plaintiffs by name.

In both cases, she is careful to set a quick, firm date by which the settlement paperwork must be filed.

Next, she oversees an hour-long pre-trial hearing to decide whether or not a defendant's rights were violated when police

searched his car without a warrant. As the prosecutor and defense lawyer cite cases to back up their stands, she suggested: "Let's do this. I'm going to look up the cases and I'll let you know."

Although Grant goes out of her way to be polite and low key, she is quick to insist upon the rules of the court for a young male defendant — who is being arraigned for threatening his mother in violation of a personal protection order. When he tries to address Grant directly, instead of through his newly-appointed public defender, she quickly warns him "that's the last time."

"I represent something," she later explains. "You have to show respect for that because I show respect for it."

Grant, whose dad Barry Grant is a probate judge, says she has not had one moment of regret about her decision to run for and become a judge. "I think the job is wonderful. I see a little bit of everything. Everything has its own story."

Asked to name her most interesting case, she picks her first murder trial, partly because it was so different from the civil litigation she had practiced.

Two young men were convicted of the murder of an older man in his 70s who lived next door to one of them. "They bludgeoned him to death," she said. "They were both sentenced to life without parole."

She also was judge for five teens who pled guilty for their part in the three-day vandalism spree at the San Marino Golf Course in Farmington Hills last April. She sent the leaders to boot camp and put the others on probation. "I made them all write me a paper — 750 words — about why what they did was wrong," she said. "That's horrible what they did to a community."

Grant would like more hours in the day, but says by putting in



Circuit Judge Nanci Grant

long days on the bench and reviewing motions and cases after her two young sons are in bed, she has been able to reduce her docket. "I'm very focused on my job when I'm here. At home I'm very focused on my family."

As a new judge, she made it a point to look for experience in hiring her five-person staff and considers each a representative of her office to the public. "We all work together," she says. "You can see that I'm the one in charge, but I let everyone do their thing."

Like most judges, she considers custody and divorce cases involving children "absolutely the hardest." In fact, Grant says: "There's a couple of times I've made a call and I wasn't sure it was right. I've called the parties back."

"I'm very impressed with her demeanor on the bench," says attorney Jeff Leib, a West Bloomfield resident with a practice based in Southfield. "She's very prepared and courteous and she listens. As a practicing lawyer, that's all you want."

Judge Grant is the recipient of the Merit Award from the Citizens Alliance for the Probate Court for her efforts in creating and implementing a series entitled, "Removing the Mysteries of the Probate Court."

Forum focuses on personal issues

Oakland Livingston Human Services Agency is sponsoring a free community forum from 7-9 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 13 at the David Ewalt Community Center in Pontiac.

The forum will have specialists on hand to address personal issues

that affect families and individuals in their everyday lives.

The following specialists will be attending: a doctor in infant's and children's health, a lawyer, counselor, grief, infant care, weatherization, child care, investment, housing and tenant and early

childhood, as well as a personal trainer.

The seminar is open to everyone. A reservation is needed and child care is available.

To reserve a seat, call Cynthia Zagat at OLHSA (248) 358-5145.