

Speaker helps students understand homelessness

BY SUE BUCK
STAFF WRITER

What does a homeless person look like? That's what Ann Rafferty, the outgoing president of the South Oakland Shelter in Royal Oak, has asked students at Our Lady of Sorrows School in Farmington prior to the annual one-week housing of SOS homeless clients in the winter.

Rafferty, an OLS parent, parishioner and volunteer drives home the facts of homelessness to children from the time she enters the classroom, wearing a long, pretty skirt. "They wear long clothes," some students say to describe the homeless.

"They are dirty and smelly and have messy hair," say others.

Then you have the clever ones who say, "They look just like you or me," Rafferty said. To prove that point, she messes up her hair, puts on a

hat, removes her skirt to reveal old sweat pants and puts on an old shirt.

"It's still me, now what do you think of me?" she asks. "Am I the same person I used to be? I just dress differently. They can be someone just like you or me. They are a person, down on their luck."

Because OLS is a Catholic school, Rafferty can incorporate God into the scenario.

"Treat them with respect, try not to prejudice," she advises. "If you didn't have access to a shower you might smell, too."

Typically, faith-based sites house SOS clients. "I started that way and it stayed that way," said Rafferty, a Farmington Hills resident. "Without them, we couldn't do it."

Clients stay evenings for a week at their work. During the day, they work.

"When they stay at OLS, for example, they are also transported to get a hair cut and go to the dentist in the evening,

HOMELESS

or. They are given a very carefully constructed set of rules that they must follow to be eligible to enter and stay in the program for a maximum of 90 days. Up to 30 guests can be housed at one time, but the clientele can change daily.

Unless clients have babies or young children, they are expected to work or be enrolled in a program to help them get job skills. "Everyone must be bread tested each evening before going to a host site and there is zero tolerance for guns and weapons, alcohol and illegal drugs," Carr said.

BREAKING THE CYCLE

"We're all about breaking the cycle," said Ann Rafferty, a Farmington Hills resident, who just finished a term as SOS president. She first became involved with SOS about eight years ago. "People in Farmington and Farmington Hills don't actually get an opportunity to meet people who are homeless," she said. "You can interact with people who are homeless right in your own hometown." Clients are the working poor who want to make a change. SOS isn't just a "caring house" where they can get a room and meal.

During their 90-day stay they are required to bank 75 percent of their pay. The clients have no expenses during this time because food and transportation costs are covered. At the end of the 90-day period, the money is given to the client, which is hopefully enough to get them on their feet and cover a security deposit and first month's rent. "The big part is educating people," Rafferty said. "People don't think they are employed anymore. They are minimally employed. I tell people to do the math. What's minimum wage? What's your expenses? You can't live like a dog and pay those bills."

PENALTY

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successful. This is going to be a statewide effort involving a lot of community groups.

The goal is to collect 400,000 signatures from registered voters in order to put the proposal on a 2004 ballot.

Patterson, Dwyer noted, spearheaded capital punishment initiatives in 1978 and 1980.

"We're not going to be reached for comment Friday."

Dwyer said the debate whether capital punishment would deter people from killing others has been going on for years.

"We're not going on record that it's a deterrent, but feel the threat of dying over killing an officer would give a reason for

a person to pause before his actions."

Dwyer said a recent survey of Michigan residents showed more than 60 percent were in support of capital punishment.

There's a great concern about the number of children being murdered in Detroit," Dwyer said. "We have the highest number of children murders in the country and we are having police officers being shot in the back and people are getting fed up with it."

He said since 1991, 25 police officers in the state have been killed, seven in the last two years and three already this year. Michigan is one of the minority states that does not support capital punishment, Dwyer said.

He noted the others are Alabama, Hawaii, Iowa, Massachusetts, Maine,

Minnesota, North Dakota, Rhode Island, Vermont, West Virginia and Wisconsin.

The group discussed the necessary strategy to amend the Michigan Constitution to include capital punishment.

The group will meet again after the state's November general election. Dwyer said members intend to send questionnaires to public officials running for office to determine their position on capital punishment.

The Michigan Association of Chiefs of Police and Michigan Sheriff's Association are expected to pass their own resolutions of support, he said.

Members of the group will also be working on drafting language for the capital punishment initiative, Dwyer said.

LIBRARY

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less headphones, patrons will be able to tune in cable news channels. A split screen will also broadcast library notices.

"On September 11, there was on 13-inch TV in this building we could get news on," Papai said. "If there's something happening, the public can get information."

The element of which Papai is the most proud is a bronze piece that hangs on the wall behind the circulation desk.

Her husband, Joe, took a number of photographs of Woodland Hills Park in Farmington Hills, and those were sent to Matthews Bronze International, along with booklets and other information about the area.

Dedicated to the memories of library board members Charlotte Yaverski and Robert Plummer, the 30' by 60' tableau features woodland creatures and plants native to this area.

"This is something the community will enjoy for many years," Papai said.

Art work plays an enormous part in the overall project. A work called "The Mime Reader" by a West Bloomfield artist will arrive soon, and Papai hopes to work with the Farmington Artists Club to

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have local works hanging from a gallery-type wall in the new section.

Perhaps the most unique piece of art, however, is a fountain sculpture that has been restored by Venus Bronzeworks in Detroit. It was created by Harriet Frishmuth, the only female student of noted sculptor August Rodin.

Quality products have been used throughout the building, from cherrywood fixtures to marble countertops. The library is wired to the world, with data and power ports installed in the study tables and even the library board's meeting room table. The board room is on the second floor of the building, along with administrative offices and meeting rooms.

Windows to the area that houses the library's history collection have a number of historic buildings etched into the glass: the Governor Warner Mansion, the Botsford Inn, Philbrick Tavern, a former blacksmith shop, the Nichols School, Longacre House, Old Town Hall (Masonic Temple), Farmington Roller Mill and the Universalist Church.

Not only are items in the historic collection stored in "preservation boxes" made of paper with a low acid level, but the room is climate controlled.

While the library does hire a professional archivist, Papai said she hopes that during peak hours, members of the local historical commissions and committees and the Genealogical Society will volunteer their time to help staff the room.

With a complete Business Center, including 24 computers, a computer training center, with 21 computers and a reprographics room that houses several copy machines and collating space, the new addition is also wired for use by the business community.

On Tuesday, construction manager Doug Madden was going over the final details preparing for city inspectors. Unfortunately, they found a few items that needed to be addressed prior to issuance of a temporary certificate of occupancy, meaning the library would miss its expected Sept. 3 opening. However, Papai said, as soon as those items are corrected and a re-inspection occurs, the library will be open for business. It's located on 12 Mile, between Orchard Lake and Farmington Roads, in Farmington Hills.

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