Department of Human Services

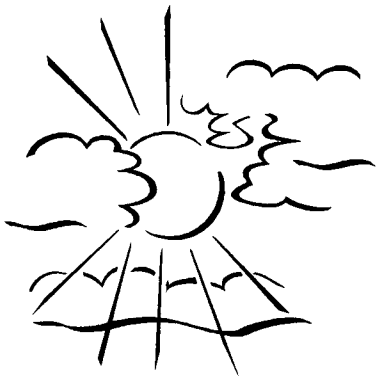
Articles in Today's Clips

Tuesday, December 27, 2005

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

Prepared by the DHS Office of Communications (517) 373-7394

Health Care



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*Important story at this spot

Letters for December 26

The Grand Rapids Press

Monday, December 26, 2005

Reform schools, not welfare

This is in response to Michigan lawmakers' recent passage of legislation that puts lifetime limits on cash assistance. Welfare reform is happening at a time when Americans are struggling to survive.

Americans are not ready for welfare to have a lifetime limit. Americans are too busy trying to continue to stay employed due to the high unemployment rates.

Children in America are living at poverty level and education does not appear to be the answer when students are dropping out of school. As a society, we need to review what standards are acceptable and what standards are not acceptable for society.

We must ask ourselves the question, "Why are so many students not motivated in our school systems?" It would seem unfair to point the blame at a "system," but what else can concerned citizens do?

When we as a society know that the best jobs are held by college graduates, what can we do to encourage the future students of America to succeed at education and work?

I think our "system" needs to first look at improving graduation rates before considering welfare reform for our poor.

FRANCENA PURCHASE-OWENS
Grand Rapids

Whose 'people'?

Grand Rapids Press

Letters

December 27, 2005

At a recent public forum, state Rep. Jerry Kooiman described his welfare reform legislation as "tough love" ("Blacks give Kooiman an earful at welfare meeting," Press, Dec. 13). Randal Jelks attacked Mr. Kooiman in a fit of arrogant bigotry. "You can't tell me that as a white man. . .Don't you dare come into this audience in front of my people and say that again."

Who are Jelks' "people"? Mr. Kooiman's legislation addresses poor people on welfare, but Mr. Jelks is a comfortably middle-class college professor. However, Mr. Jelks chose to make this a racial issue. Are "his people" unable to handle tough love? Are they above it? What about all the white people on welfare with their own obstacles to overcome?

Race is actually an irrelevant indicator of poverty. Rather, poverty is tightly coupled to family breakdown for all races. I would suggest that Rep. Kooiman's bill demonstrates real compassion and respect for all people.

Author Shelby Steele observes that some poor are more attracted to the seductive power of victim-hood than to the hard work and tough love required to rise from their oppression. He believes this self-victimization is deadlier than discrimination. Therefore, in certain respects the plight of blacks is worse today than before the civil rights victories. Victimization is a one-way ticket to bitterness and despair.

Mr. Steele has coined the term "grievance elites" for those such as Randal Jelks and Jesse Jackson who derive fame and fortune from their positions while providing few tangible benefits for their constituents. Mr. Jelks' people are better served by Rep. Kooiman and Sen. Bill Hardiman, who work to strengthen families.

Sadly, Gov. Granholm threatens to veto welfare reform legislation. She will not help the poor, but she will shore up the power base for victimization slumlords.

PAUL RHODA
Grandville

AP NEWS
Dec 27, 12:11 AM EST

Entitlements Consume More Federal Spending

By STEPHEN OHLEMACHER
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) -- Three growing entitlement programs consumed nearly half of all federal spending in 2004, and budget analysts expect them to make up an even bigger share in the future.

Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid accounted for more than $1 trillion in the 2004 budget year, according to the Consolidated Federal Funds Report being released Tuesday by the Census Bureau.

Overall federal spending was $2.2 trillion, an increase of 5 percent from 2003.

"The total federal spending increase is actually down a bit from recent years," said Gerard Keffer, chief of the Census Bureau's federal programs branch. "It had been running 6 to 8 percent in the past several years."

For years, Washington has been fighting over how to manage the growth of entitlement programs. Analysts think the fight will continue for years to come.

"I think it's absolutely essential and inevitable that we are going to reform those programs," said Rudolph Penner, a senior fellow at the Urban Institute, a social issues research organization. "How, is another question. There's very little interest, now."

President Bush has pushed to overhaul Social Security and establish private accounts, but Congress has balked.

Critics argue that private accounts would do nothing to slow the growth of Social Security spending - unless benefits are cut, a politically unpopular option.

Spending on Medicare, the federal health insurance program for the elderly, is set to increase with the introduction of a drug benefit in January. The federal government estimates it will spend about $724 billion over 10 years to provide the Medicare drug benefit.

Other factors contributing to spending increases include an aging population and soaring health care costs, Penner said. The oldest baby boomers will start turning 60 in January, and once they start qualifying for Social Security benefits, costs will grow at an even faster pace.

Penner said increased spending on entitlement programs eventually will mean less money for other programs and increased pressure to raise taxes. "I think they're going to squeeze out all sorts of other spending items," said Penner, former director of the Congressional Budget Office.

The Census Bureau compiles the federal spending report each year with information from about 50 federal agencies, Keffer said. One purpose is to show how much federal money goes to each state.

The report excludes spending on foreign aid, international affairs and interest payments on the national debt, a total of about $200 billion in 2004, because those items do not go to individual states, Keffer said.

It also does not specify spending for the Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency or the National Security Agency because those budgets are classified, Keffer said.

Among the report's findings:

- One third of all federal spending went to five states in 2004: California; New York; Texas; Florida; and Pennsylvania.
- California led all states with $232 billion.
- Wyoming received the least money, $4.4 billion.
- Alaska received only $8.4 billion. But with its relatively small population, it led the nation in per capita federal spending, at $12,885 a person.
- Nevada received the lowest per capita amount, $5,469 a person.
- Defense Department spending was highest in California, Virginia, Texas, Florida and Maryland.

On the Net:

Consolidated Federal Funds Report:

http://www.census.gov/govs/www/cffr.html

005 The Associated Press.

Medicare Drug Plans

The New York Times

Published: December 27, 2005

To the Editor:

Re "Over a Million on Medicare Sign Up for New Drug Plan" (news article, Dec. 23):
The swell of people signing up for the new Medicare drug plans should not be taken as a sign that all is well. While the program may save people some money, the detailed rules may ultimately prove unworkable. For instance, the plan a person chooses can change the drugs it covers on 60 days' notice, but the person is locked into the plan for a year.
Unanswered questions loom, such as what will be the impact of enrollment on continued employer health coverage; who has authority to enroll a person with diminished capacity; and how plan exceptions will be processed.
Taxpayers are paying for a powerful marketing campaign of television, print and bus ads to encourage people to sign up, with little money allocated to helping people, one on one, understand the complicated terms of the plans. We are left wondering why this "benefit" is so hard on its beneficiaries.

Amy T. Paul
Executive Director
Friends and Relatives of Institutionalized Aged
New York, Dec. 23, 2005

Not a decrease

The Grand Rapids Press

December 26, 2005

To the editor:

When is an increase a decrease? Michigan along with other states seem to be bothered that we are only going to get an increase of 7.5 percent in Medicaid assistance ("States decry federal rollback," Press, Dec. 11).
That is still twice the rate of inflation. The second paragraph in the Dec. 11 article says: "Slowing the growth in federal funding to the states would be disastrous, Michigan officials say. . ."
The original plan apparently was 7.7 percent. This represents an increase in our tax obligation. The same outcry was voiced when the school food program was going to get a raise of 6 percent instead of 10 percent a few years ago.
At that time Senator Carl Levin came to Grand Rapids and made a big fuss about the children being starved because of the reduction in food, when it was really an increase. It seems that every bill for funds that is passed gets an automatic increase over the years way more than the cost of living. The headline should be: "We will be getting a big increase again this year from the Feds."

H. ALFRED GEORGE
Plainfield Township

Granholm asks balance in tax cutting

Loss of federal aid hinders Medicaid

By KATHY BARKS HOFFMAN
ASSOCIATED PRESS

LANSING — Gov. Jennifer Granholm said Thursday that she'd like to see the state's main business tax simplified and restructured.

But she warned that it's even more important that further cuts be balanced with revenue increases now that the federal government looks as though it will cut a substantial amount from Michigan's Medicaid program.

"We already are going into a very tight budget year because of what has happened" with federal funding, Granholm told reporters at her year-end news conference at the Capitol. "Any further restructuring will have to be just that — restructuring."

Michigan's Medicaid program offers health-care coverage to 1.4 million low-income children, seniors and disabled residents at a cost of about $6 billion a year. Roughly half the cost is picked up by the federal government. Another $1.5 billion annually goes toward Medicaid mental health services.

Congress seems set to pass a bill that would cut the federal share by $500 million. Granholm says that would hurt the state's ability to balance its budget.

Both Granholm and GOP legislative leaders said this week that the economy will remain the focus in 2006 and that marked improvement in job growth probably won't be seen until 2007 and 2008.

The Democratic governor and the Republican-controlled Legislature agreed at the end of the year on a package of bills that will trim taxes companies pay on equipment and other personal property.

The tax credit, plus tax breaks for financially troubled auto suppliers **Delphi Corp.** and **Visteon Corp.**, will cost around $600 million over four years and is aimed at encouraging manufacturers to consolidate their operations in Michigan.

"I will continue to go to other countries and states to bring jobs to Michigan and attract international investment here. We will not rest until we achieve the success that we know we can achieve," Granholm said Thursday.

Published December 23, 2005

Angel House

A Lansing State Journal editorial

Just in time for Christmas, this gift to the area's neglected and abused children: Angel House.

If it isn't yet a household name in our community, it will be.

Angel House opened Thursday with appropriate fanfare. It's taken years, dedication and donations to build the $1.1 million shelter in Mason. Hundreds of people have given money, materials and labor to make the shelter a reality. Officials say $300,000 is still needed to wipe away the remaining construction debt.

Angel House will be able to house up to 15 children at a time in a home-like setting. There, they can get medical care and, if necessary, be interviewed by counselors and law enforcement officials.

That may sound like an extravagance to some folks. But consider the children's point of view. They're removed from their homes by strangers, and often are separated from siblings. They may be interviewed in the back of a patrol car.

Angel House aims to take some of the shock out of an already traumatic situation. Children can stay for up to two weeks, often with brothers and sisters. And the house becomes the focal point of the child's needs. The agencies involved will come to them, not the other way around.

Angel House: Its name and purpose are a perfect fit for this season of good will.

PN 12/23

Abandoned newborns' mom sought

CHICAGO — Police searched Thursday for the mother of healthy newborn twins who were found abandoned in the vestibule of a church. The children were discovered Wednesday by a church custodian who heard a noise and found the twins in a baby carrier. The infants were listed in good condition, and hospital officials named them Mary and Joseph.

HAVEN celebrates another year of turning around lives

By Christy Strawser

Daily Tribune Staff Writer

PUBLISHED: December 27, 2005

These are guys mothers warn their daughters about, the kind of men who leave wives or girlfriends black and blue. They're convicted abusers with pasts strewn with broken bones and wrecked lives. And the first program to bring them out of the dark, to try and rehabilitate them on a large scale, is here in Oakland County.

HAVEN, a Give-A-Christmas Year Around recipient, is celebrating another successful year for an innovative program for batterers that gathers 40 or more men with a history of violence.

They form groups where master's level therapists confront what makes them batterers, forces them to accept accountability for their behavior and teaches the right way to vent anger and frustration.

"HAVEN has taught me about recognizing my feelings more clearly; expressing my feelings more clearly; power and control tactics and how hurtful they are to others; communication is important and makes you feel better about yourself," said one graduate of the program.

HAVEN therapists drive the point home by showing clients the impact abuse has had on their partner and children as well as the losses they experienced from those tactics. They can begin to identify and change the beliefs associated with abuse and develop healthier ways of coping.

"I feel HAVEN has taught me how to be connected to my own feelings. HAVEN has also shown me how to have empathy not only for my partner but also for my fellow employees and friends," another reformed batterer said.

Abusers only finish after they've worked out a plan to remain violence-free.

"The benefits of HAVEN have been many. A program of this nature should be taught at an even younger age so that all the good tools for proper behavior management are known earlier in life. If I knew all that I know now then my life would be richer for it. ... I've learned about the importance of accountability," said a member of the program.

Because the two often go hand in hand, the battering program includes a Taking Responsibility For Yourself program to address the dual issues of substance abuse and domestic violence. Those clients have to include a relapse prevention plan.

And to keep it in reach for everyone, clients are only assessed fees based

on their income, so the less you have, the less you pay.
That's where donations come in. HAVEN is one of nine core charities for Give-A-Christmas Year Around, which also assists the Judson Center, Salvation Army, Common Ground Sanctuary, Troy People Concerned, South Oakland Shelter, Community Services of Oakland, the Boys and Girls Club of South Oakland County and South Oakland YMCA. There was enough the last two years to add the Clawson YWCA and Gateway Counseling in Madison Heights.
Checks should be made to "Give-A-Christmas Year Around" and sent to:
Give-A-Christmas
c/o Daily Tribune
210 E. Third St.
Royal Oak, MI 48067
Total to date: $44,627.77
Needed to reach goal: $35,372.23

Feedback from detnews.com

12/27

Is it fair for judge to rule abuser cannot live with woman?

From: Larry Zimmer
City: Brighton

FAIR?!! You want fair, the guy should be locked away until he's 65 — in solitary. These are exactly the type of people that don't belong in any society any time.

From: Jim Stabu
City: Livonia

In the land I used to live in, people paid for their crimes and then were forgiven in the eyes of the law. Apparently no longer is that the case. This is literally Big Brother in the bedroom. How liberal of that judge to presuppose so much personal power upon himself.

From: Dee Macko
City: Misery Bay

Perhaps the judge should have sentenced this man to one year without any contact with women. He can still go to some woman's house and beat her up.

From: Joe Kluwecksinski
City: Warren

Has anyone thought the judge was doing him a BIG favor? Think about it.

From: Jim Kress
City: Northville

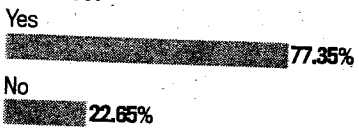
The federal government (i.e. the judge) has no constitutional authority to impose this sentence — for a plethora of reasons. If the people want more severe punishment the Constitution must be amended to give the feds jurisdiction, the Legislature should enact stiffer laws or/and the prosecutor should stop plea bargaining. The person in question can only be punished for crimes he has committed, not those he might commit.

From: Jen McGregor
City: Howell

I think this is a great idea. I have been in an emotionally abusive relationship. My ex played head games with me, was very controlling and emotionally abusive. Go read up on abusive relationships. The fact is, until they can admit they have a problem and seek professional help, they will just continue with their pattern of abuse.

CyberSurvey

In sentencing a man with a history of domestic violence, a federal judge ruled that when the man is released from prison, for one year he cannot live with any woman. Is that a fair sentence?



Based on a nonscientific survey of 437 detnews.com readers.

The Detroit News

From: Sally Nelson
City: Grand Rapids

Evil only happens when good people do nothing. The judge has a perfect practical stand against violence and gives women a running start from a convicted predator.

From: Peter Pettigrew
City: Troy

This man has shown that he does not have the self-control or restraint necessary to function in society. God forbid he starts to abuse his children, stepchildren and girlfriends. It doesn't take much to send someone impulsive like this over the edge. If someone shows a pattern of violence or criminal behavior, then they need to be stopped.

From: Joseph Constant
City: Bloomfield Hills

The domestic abuser is in disrespect of society at large, and in the specific disrespect of the female person. It is appropriate that society must act, to protect the vulnerable. A man with a history of domestic abuse should be restricted for life from women and all those categories of persons that he has abused.

From: A. Jackson
City: Ann Arbor

Here, the judge was actually kind. My sentence of choice would be to have the abuser scheduled for a 15-round match with a professional boxer. Then he can see how he "measures up" to someone with a real license to "abuse."

Drive gives homeless a hand in cold times
Macomb organization fills funding gaps for agencies stung by dwindling donations.

Charles E. Ramirez / The Detroit News

ROSEVILLE -- Moses Wilson wasn't sure he'd be able to give his two children a Christmas this year.

The 25-year-old lost his job after returning from serving in the Air National Guard in Iraq and soon found himself and his family homeless.

But thanks to Solid Ground Inc., a Roseville-based nonprofit organization that offers homeless families shelter and support services for up to 24 months, Wilson's children still got gifts from Santa.

"We have nowhere to go," said Wilson, who is originally from Detroit and is now living in a Roseville hotel with his wife and kids. "But there are other people who are even less fortunate than we are."

Some help for homeless people like Wilson and his family is on the way from the county.

Macomb County has raised more than $1,000 in a new campaign to get residents and local businesses to help the area's homeless, said Phil Frame, county spokesman.

The county launched the effort, Macomb Together/Helping at Home, last week.

The county will distribute all the donations it receives under the program to the Macomb Homeless Coalition and the Macomb Food Program.

The coalition is an umbrella group for local nonprofit organizations that provide shelter and support services to the homeless.

Its members include the Macomb County Rotating Emergency Shelter Team -- a group of churches that temporarily house the homeless -- the Salvation Army, Solid Ground and Turning Point, which also helps the victims of domestic violence.

The Macomb Food Program is a nonprofit organization created by the county to help feed the hungry through 52 neighborhood pantries. The program is part of the Macomb County Community Services Agency.

The county hopes to raise at least $35,595 -- enough to enable organizations in the Macomb Homeless Coalition to house people for the next three months.

Wilson says programs like Solid Ground are a huge help to people who don't have anywhere to live.

"People need help," he said. "Places like this are a godsend."

Peter Howard, 65, of Sterling Heights, said he made a donation to the Macomb Together campaign last week.

"I'm not affluent by any means, but I felt like I had to do something to help," he said. "I hope others will help out, too."

Officials estimate there are more than 1,100 homeless people in the county this year, up about 5 percent from 2004. County agencies and nonprofit groups have capacity to help only about a third of the homeless population, officials said.

They also estimate 11 homeless people have died in the county this year.

Jimetta Lewis, executive director of the Macomb County Rotating Emergency Shelter Team welcomes the county's latest effort to help the homeless.
"We're excited about it," she said. "Because of all of the natural disasters like Hurricane Katrina this year, we've seen a huge drop in our donations."
"Around the holidays, we normally receive about $20,000 in donations," she said. "This year, we've received about $8,000."
"Hopefully, this new program will help," she said. The shelter team is headquartered in Roseville.
Dee McCardle, executive director of Solid Ground, also applauds the program.
"There are so many folks out there hurting right now," she said. "And we need to help them."

You can reach Charles E. Ramirez at (586) 468-2905 or cramirez@detnews.com

Macomb Together/Helping at Home
Donations to help the homeless in Macomb County should be mailed to: Macomb Together, Mount Clemens, MI 48043.
Donations may also be dropped off at the following locations:
Macomb County Administration Building, 1 S. Main, Mount Clemens
Macomb County Sheriff's Office, 4365 Elizabeth, Mount Clemens
Freedom Hill County Park, 15000 Metropolitan Parkway, Sterling Heights
Macomb County Health Department, Southwest Health Clinic, 27690 Van Dyke, Warren
Macomb County Health Department, Southeast Health Clinic, 25401 Harper, St. Clair Shores
42nd District Court Building, 14713 33 Mile Romeo.
Source: Macomb County

Holiday cheer for homeless
Shelter, churches provide meals

December 26, 2005

BY JULIE EDGAR
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Patricia Willis donned a long velvet skirt and shiny embroidered jacket for her shift Sunday at Neighborhood Service Organization's 24-hour warming shelter on Third Street in Detroit.
The direct-care worker said she hoped the elegant ensemble would bring some cheer to the rather grim shelter, where some 250 men and 40 or so women slumped in chairs in separate areas watching television. Most appeared to be lost in thought.
But at least their stomachs were full.
People from area churches had already been by at midday, either to read scripture or to take the willing to church to celebrate Christmas. The Masonic Temple brought a hearty meal in the morning and some of the people who use the shelter were taken to Second Baptist Church for a meal and spiritual succor.
"Sure, it feels like Christmas," said 42-year-old Mollie Lee, a regular at the NSO shelter for about five years. The building is open 24 hours but does not have beds; Lee is among the people who go to an overnight shelter at the end of the day.
"This is my extended family," she said, gesturing to the women.
Despite the shaky Michigan economy, the number of people seeking help hasn't jumped noticeably from last year, said the Rev. Faith Fowler of Cass United Methodist Church, which runs three overnight shelters, a soup kitchen and warming shelters in Detroit.
A sit-down meal was served Sunday at Cass United Methodist as part of a program involving one of its sister congregations, Saline United Methodist. In all, about 250 people had a warm meal and were given sweatshirts and scarves.
At least Sunday's weather was tolerable for some folks to wait for a bus to visit family members, said Fowler.
"The weather was a little nicer, so it helped people get to places," she said.
By 1:15 p.m., Cass United Methodist, at Cass and Selden, was clearing out.
Carl Jones was among the last diners because he arrived late. But he took his time savoring his turkey and mashed potatoes.
He planned to head over to Mario's Italian restaurant on Second for another holiday meal before heading to a temporary home to watch the Pistons game.
Jones, 54, said Christmas reminds him that he'd like to be closer to his two children, both in college in Kentucky and Florida, and his brothers in Kentucky.
"Last year I had a more 'up' spirit. I don't know what it is. I can't put my finger on it," he said. "It's good when you're around your own family."

*Contact **JULIE EDGAR** at 248-351-3294 or edgar@freepress.com.*

Metro Detroit

Official is accused of stealing from poor

She got mansion; renters got shaft

December 24, 2005

BY MARYANNE GEORGE
FREE PRESS ANN ARBOR BUREAU

As a state housing official, LaToya Cotton was supposed to help some of the poorest people in Washtenaw County obtain federal rent aid.

But investigators say that over 10 years, Cotton, 45, stole the identities of dozens of people and used the information to divert more than $1 million in housing vouchers for her own use, according to documents filed this week in U.S. District Court in Detroit.

A search warrant affidavit for her office filed by Greg Stejskal, the FBI's senior agent in Ann Arbor, described how Cotton allegedly used her position with the Michigan State Housing Development Authority to siphon personal information, generating housing vouchers that were sent directly to a bogus account she created.

"This case is Robin Hood in reverse," Stejskal said Friday. "She was living in a mansion and there were low-income people on a Section 8 waiting list."

Neither Cotton nor her attorney, Tim McDaniel, could be reached for comment, but according to the court documents Cotton has agreed to plead guilty to a charge of theft. Under that agreement, she would be sentenced to between 37 and 46 months in prison.

She can withdraw from the agreement prior to going before a judge; no hearing date has been scheduled. If she withdraws the plea, she could face a maximum of 10 years in prison if convicted on the charge of stealing from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Section 8 program.

The agreement also calls for her to forfeit an $850,000 house Cotton purchased in Canton Township last year.

Housing officials learned of the alleged fraud in March when the Ann Arbor Housing Commission was unable to obtain a voucher for a single mother living in an apartment owned by the commission, the court documents said.

Records with the state Housing Development Authority revealed the vouchers in the woman's name were being sent to the bogus account set up by Cotton, investigators alleged.

HUD officials forwarded the case to federal officials.

"This is the most extreme case of fraud I have seen in nearly 25 years," Cindy Telfer, housing programs manager for the Ann Arbor Housing Commission, said Friday. "These are the most disenfranchised, low-income families that are being taken advantage of."

Cotton, who worked as an agent for the state Housing Development Authority for about 15 years until she was fired in September, administered various housing voucher programs, including the HUD Section 8 program, for hundreds of clients from her office in downtown Ypsilanti, investigators said.

When some clients applied for vouchers, Cotton allegedly used their personal information to generate a rental voucher that was deposited into an account she created under the name of Washtenaw Payee Services.

Investigators said the account was made to look as if it were distributing housing vouchers to landlords.

Cotton made withdrawals from that account for her own use, Stejskal said.

Clients whose identities were stolen were told they were still on a waiting list or that they were not approved, Stejskal said.

Meanwhile, other applicants who may have qualified for vouchers continued to wait.

Investigators allege that Cotton also solicited people to apply for the vouchers who would not have otherwise applied.

She then stole the identities of a few clients at a time for a couple of years, later dropping them off the list and replacing them to avoid detection, Stejskal said.

"Over the years there were dozens of people who should have gotten vouchers who didn't get them," he said. "Others were made to wait longer because of the fraud. Everyone on the Section 8 waiting list was a potential victim."

In September, when federal agents searched Cotton's Ypsilanti office, she was allegedly using the names of eight clients to generate fraudulent payments. She had a client list of 400 people, investigators said.

*Contact **MARYANNE GEORGE** at 734-665-5600 or mageorge@freepress.com.*

DN 3B 11/23

PONTIAC

Agencies to receive housing grants

Seven Oakland County nonprofit agencies will receive more than $2.9 million in federal grants in 2006 to provide transitional and permanent housing for the homeless. The Oakland County Taskforce on Homelessness and Affordable Housing's providers were awarded a McKinney grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development to fund targeted homeless programs. A January 2005 census in Oakland County found 1,295 people who met HUD's definition of homeless, an 11 percent increase over a similar 2004 census.

Lingering evacuees pose problem for officials

DN 12/23

■ Those poor, needy before Katrina will be most difficult to move out of hotels before FEMA Feb. 7 deadline.

COLUMBIA, S.C. — The hurricane evacuees living in a string of flophouse motels here three months on are among the most down-and-out. They were the hidden underclass in New Orleans, with no steady jobs or real addresses, and they will be the hardest for frustrated government officials to move out of hotels and into apartments.

There is Deborah Eubanks, 55, who pops 18 pills a day — for diabetes, hepatitis, asthma and depression — and said, "I don't have the ability to think."

There is Cheryl Sykes, who hardly leaves her third-floor room except to take her diarrhea-ridden 200-pound mastiff, Huei Duei Dobbs, to "potty."

And there is Melvin Allen, whose many missing teeth make him look decades older than his 48 years, and whose breath smells like beer before noon.

Even in states like South Carolina that have only a relative handful of people remaining in hotels, some local officials have begun to throw up their hands at the prospect of moving the last ones out before the Feb. 7 deadline imposed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

The people who could fend for themselves, they said, have found other accommodations; rooms are occupied mainly by the elderly, disabled or mentally ill. Many are felons whose applications for apartments routinely get rejected, or people with a string of evictions who seem to be waiting to be tossed out again.

Many more are ineligible for the $2,358 in rental assistance offered by FEMA, because they were essentially homeless before the storm.

MARY HAGGERTY / NYTNS

Katrina evacuee Emma Lou Williamson and her cat, Baby Girl, are staying at the motel. Some local officials have begun to throw up their hands at the prospect of moving the last ones out before the federal Feb. 7 deadline.

"These are the problem children," said Ginger Crocker, a former state legislator and now with the state emergency management department who worked frantically during the past week to get about 200 evacuees in government-financed hotel rooms here to sign apartment leases backed by the local housing authority. "These folks were dependent where they were, and they're going to be dependent here."

But emptying the hotels is among the thorniest problems in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, one that additional time may not be enough to solve.

The challenge is greatest in Texas and Louisiana, states that have more than half the estimated 40,000 remaining hotel rooms and have rapidly run out of other housing options for low-income evacuees.

Barry Porter, executive director of the Red Cross chapter in Raleigh, N.C., predicted that many of those remaining in hotels would eventually become homeless in their new hometowns.

"These are obviously people who have extenuating circumstances," he said. "You can't make somebody go live in a place. You can't tell them where they're going."

Said Crocker: "The real problem is that many of these people have never lived in a place as nice as a hotel. They have cable TV and a telephone and heating and air and maid service, and we're feeding them dinner every night."

Friday, December 23, 2005

Betty DeRamus

The Detroit News

Hunger, need are alive and well in unexpected places

In the Old Testament's Book of Ruth, poor people known as "gleaners" lived on the leavings of the rich, scooping up stalks of grain that reapers left behind.

Gleaners are still among us, and givers, too, but it's no longer so easy to tell the poor from the rich or the fully fed from the half-starved.

As America celebrates both Christmas and the start of Hanukkah on Sunday, hunger no longer plagues only people living in cardboard-box communities or sleeping on church steps or shooting heroin in public bathrooms. Nagging hunger and need sit at many Michigan tables.

Children with struggling parents now make up 51 percent of the people receiving food from shelters, soup kitchens and other agencies supplied by Gleaners Community Food Bank of Southeastern Michigan. Gleaners serves Wayne, Oakland, Macomb, Livingston, Washtenaw and Monroe counties.

Eight percent of the people receiving such food are seniors on fixed incomes, a group that must sometimes choose between medicine or shelter and who might be raising one or more grandchildren younger than 18.

Ruth Ellen Mayhall, vice president of development for Gleaners, says she's never seen things so bad in Michigan, not even during the recession of the 1980s.

"The face of hunger is in every community," she says. "It has no bias. It's seniors on fixed incomes, the working poor, the disabled. ... It's people who do work and ... just don't make enough to (pay for) food, shelter and medicine and (take care) of the kids they're schooling. It's people who just lost their jobs."

Humble beginnings

When Gleaners was founded in 1977, it was only the third food bank in the country. Its mission was to gather surplus food, store it safely and pass it around to nonprofit agencies and charities directly feeding the hungry.

The agency's food is gleaned from farmers, grocery stores, supermarkets, food distributors, food processors and individuals who donate canned foods to food drives. Some manufacturers donate food because labels contain errors, products are being dropped or a store is closing. Stores might even donate Halloween candy to avoid keeping it on shelves past the holiday season.

Gleaners is still doing its job, but donations are plunging and the agency is being forced to dip into its reserves.

Sharing with other causes

Mayhall knows it's not easy to ask people for money now -- not after the tsunami that swallowed parts of Asia and the hurricanes that ate through the American South. And not when Michigan's crumbling economy has clobbered so many families.

Still, those of us with full refrigerators and wallets must make sure some grain is left in the fields for our hard-pressed neighbors, relatives and friends. And even one tax-deductible dollar will enable Gleaners to distribute 16 pounds of food.

If you really believe in unlimited love and in the power of faith to overcome any odds -- the twin messages of this season -- you can reach Gleaners at (313) 923-3535, Ext. 241, or www.gcfb.org.

Betty DeRamus' column runs Monday, Wednesday and Friday in Metro. Reach her at (313) 222-2296 or bderamus@ detnews.com.

Fire heaps woe on Detroit church
Soup kitchen shuttered, parishioners to worship elsewhere after blaze damages All Saints on Fort.

David Josar / The Detroit News

DETROIT -- The smoky smell in the air underscored the hand-printed note on the door Monday at All Saints Catholic Church in southwest Detroit: "Soup kitchen closed due to fire."

The day after Christmas was one of cleaning and problem-solving after an early morning fire ripped through the basement of the 109-year-old church, destroying equipment and staples used for the food pantry and twice-weekly soup kitchen.

"We're hopeful we'll get back and running soon," said Sister Eileen Lantzy, who coordinates soup kitchen operations at the church, at 7824 W. Fort.

People were being directed to other Detroit soup kitchens, and church members were told to worship at other parishes.

No one was hurt in the fire, but the large refrigerators and dry goods, such as beans, macaroni and cheese and cornbread mix, were destroyed.

Emergency repair crews Monday were trying to fix the electricity, drive out the eye-burning smoke and sop up the inch-deep water left behind by Detroit firefighters.

The cause of the fire was still undetermined Monday.

Meanwhile, large dehumidifiers ran nonstop in the church's chapel to prevent long-term water and smoke damage.

All activities at All Saints have been canceled, including today's lunch for about 250 needy people. Still, Lantzy and parish pastor Father Ed Zaorski are hopeful a vacant convent next door can be readied quickly as a temporary staging area for meals and food giveaways.

Church members have been asked to attend Mass at St John Cantius and Sts. Andrew and Benedict.

Volunteers from other churches also are being mobilized to help with cleanup and preparing a temporary facility.

"You have to remain positive," said Zaorski, who was awakened at 2 a.m. Monday by a frantic phone call from the church's live-in maintenance man.

"He said 'fire' and I thought 'fire that's not good.' I didn't know what to expect," Zaorski said.

Eventually, insurance will pay for repairs but in the short term, the soup kitchen and pantry need help.

Most pressing, Zaorski said, are refrigerators to keep food cold. The vacant convent has a small kitchen but it will need modifications to get it ready.

Also welcome are donations of food as well as money to get the repair under way quickly, he said.

Zaorski estimates it will be several months until the basement kitchen and gymnasium used as a dining room are ready to feed the area's hungry again. For now, the convent will have to do.

"We'll be able to do it. It's just going to take longer to feed everyone," Lantzy said.

They had no firm numbers, but Lantzy and Zaorski said the population of people turning to soup kitchens for help is increasing.

"As all the buildings downtown get developed, they're being pushed away," said Zaorski, who has been at the church for a decade.

On Monday, two of those who had come for a meal were Jimmy Smiley, 46, and Florence Dean, who was bundled up in a full-length down coat. "Things are going to be a lot tougher for us now," Smiley said. "This means we're going to have to just walk a lot farther to get something to eat."

Smiley and Dean quickly debated whether a church at Trumbull and Michigan still served a free meal, but quickly decided it had closed in the fall and that they would have to look elsewhere. But Smiley and Dean said the Detroit church community has a reputation for caring for the needy.

"Everyone seems to work together so you can find a meal any day of the week," Dean said. "It's tough, but you can make it."

You can reach David Josar at (313) 222-2073 or djosar@ detnews.com.

How to help

Those wishing to help All Saints Church can drop off donations or mail them to the church at 7824 W. Fort St., Detroit, MI 48209. The phone number is (313) 841-1428.

Needed assistance includes commercial-style refrigerators, food items and cash.

Burned-out soup kitchen to revive
Detroit church seeks help to do it

December 27, 2005

BY JOHN BEBOW
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

In his Christmas Eve homily, the Rev. Ed Zaorski talked about the chaos in the lives of Mary and Joseph, reminding parishioners at All Saints Catholic Church in southwest Detroit that Christianity's most holy night was not silent.

Less than 36 hours later, there was chaos in the All Saints basement: a soup kitchen ablaze, with smoke engulfing the nativity scene and poinsettias in the sanctuary.

The fire, shortly before 2 a.m. Monday, destroyed the soup kitchen and temporarily left some 500 poor and homeless people without a crucial source of hot food.

"We really need help, and we need it quickly," said Zaorski, 53, who has served for 10 years as priest of the church on Fort Street near Springwells.

Zaorski said he hopes to reopen the soup kitchen next week in a vacant convent next to All Saints. Two other groups -- the Salvation Army and Gleaners Community Food Bank of Southeastern Michigan -- stepped in to fill the gap.

Beginning this morning, the Salvation Army will increase southwest Detroit stops for its fleet of bed-and-bread trucks that serve meals to some 4,000 people a day throughout the city.

The Salvation Army and Gleaners also plan to establish a field kitchen somewhere near the church until the All Saints meal operation is up and running again.

"We're ready to go," said Russ Russell, director of development for the Salvation Army's Eastern Michigan Division. "We deal with people who get burned out every day."

Agencies in Gleaners' food bank network serve about 66,500 metro Detroiters each week. In 2004, Gleaners distributed 30 million tons of food in the region. And, with the economy in the doldrums, the need is growing, according to those ladling the meals.

"We're experiencing an increased homeless population," Zaorski said. "We've been thinking of expanding because of the need."

The cause of the All Saints blaze is unknown. It took firefighters more than an hour to put it out. By then, the basement where soup kitchen visitors dine was under a foot of water and soot streaked the sanctuary walls.

About 225 families worship at the church, founded in 1896. Zaorski is redirecting them to nearby St. John Cantius and St. Andrew and Benedict parishes.

An accompanying pantry, where 200 needy families go each week for baskets of canned food, vegetables and meats, also was damaged in the fire.

Zaorski said he will depend on donations to reopen the kitchen and pantry.

The soup kitchen normally opens at 11 a.m. Mondays and Wednesdays, but on this Monday, a sign taped to the thick wooden doors of the church gave news of the fire. Steve Niemiek of Riverview heard about it on the radio, filled the trunk of his Buick with cookies and other sweets, and drove to All Saints for the lunch hour.

"The people are still coming here," Niemiek said. "At least this gives them a little something."

Walking away with an armload of cupcakes, 42-year-old Perry Smith declared Niemiek his personal Santa Claus.
"Work is slow and this means a lot," said Smith of Detroit, a part-timer in a canvas factory who planned to spend Monday afternoon collecting cans and bottles for deposits.
Others drove up in rusted pickups, wearing frayed jeans and old tennis shoes, eager for their regular Monday lunch. Church volunteers have operated the All Saints soup kitchen for more than a decade on a shoestring budget. At a cost of a dollar per meal, they dish out full-course dinners, including soup, salad, entree, vegetables, dessert and beverages.
LaBron Moore, 48, jumped off a Fort Street bus in anticipation of a hot meal, only to receive a plate of sweets from Niemiek. Moore picked off a few candy canes and cookies, covered the rest, and left them on the church steps.
"I'm just considerate, that's all," Moore said. "You watch. Someone will come along pretty soon who needs it."

*Contact **JOHN BEBOW** at 313-222-8851 or jbebow@freepress.com.*

How to help

- For more information about how to help All Saints Catholic Church, call 313-671-3189, 313-478-2363 or 313-381-1184. For its new soup kitchen, the church needs paper towels, paper plates and plastic silverware, dry milk, rice, beans, canned goods and cash donations.

Published December 27, 2005
[From the Lansing State Journal]

Detroit fire destroys church soup kitchen

Associated Press

DETROIT - A soup kitchen that serves 500 people each week was destroyed by fire Monday, the Archdiocese of Detroit said.

The All Saints Catholic Church also sustained smoke damage to its parish hall and church building.

The Rev. Ed Zaorski, church priest, is seeking donations and help to move the kitchen to a building that once served as a convent.

"Over 500 people per week come to All Saints Soup Kitchen and 200 people per week come to All Saints Pantry," Zaorski said. "We really need help and we need it quickly to relocate the kitchen to the former convent."

The fire started about 2 a.m. and may have been sparked by an electrical malfunction, Zaorski said.

People already were dropping off food, nonperishable goods and money Monday. "It's been a great response," Zaorski said. If all goes well, the kitchen and pantry could be open in a week, he said.

Donations can be made to the All Saints Church, 7824 W. Fort St., Detroit, MI 48209.

Restaurant gives away dinner to hundreds

Saturday, December 24, 2005

By Lynn Turner
lturner@kalamazoogazette.com 388-8564

Jeffery McNally knows a thing or two about being cold, hungry and homeless.
Kicked out of the house at 14 with $50 to his name, McNally ``bounced hard" a couple of times, imprisoned for selling drugs and having to ask strangers for help when he was broke and alone.
Now pastor of the small Word for Life Church of God congregation in Comstock and owner of McNally's Kitchen, McNally, 45, offered up warmth, food, fellowship, winter clothing and blankets to anyone who stopped by Friday night at the downtown Kalamazoo restaurant, 224 West Michigan Ave.
``We're trying to help them get off the street," he said as dozens of people partook of the food and blankets. McNally received a handshake and a ``thank you" or ``Merry Christmas" from some as they headed out to the cold, damp night.
Several other restaurants and organizations helped McNally put together the giveaway. And McNally said he's working to put together a network of area churches willing to help the homeless in concert with local charitable groups.
``We're asking them to befriend them and help them get off the street," McNally said of the churches.
McNally said he's hoping to put together a picnic in Bronson Park for the homeless next summer.
``This is something I always wanted to do," he said of the Friday night effort. ``We couldn't do it last year. We just opened in October (of 2004)."
Volunteers at the restaurant served about 450 people, he said. Food was also available for people to take out.
Michael and Teresa Ibach said they might not have been able to eat Friday night without McNally's generosity.
``I appreciate this," Michael Ibach said, slicing roast beef and complimenting the gravy. ``This is delicious."
The homeless couple have spots where they stay. Teresa Ibach, 53, said she used to have an apartment in a rooming house until Bronson Methodist Hospital bought it and turned out everyone. She hasn't been able to afford a place since, although she hopes to one day.
Michael Ibach, 43, said he was doing fairly well until his dishwashing job at a downtown restaurant disappeared when the establishment moved to Portage. He wants a job. He's working on a part-time basis with a local janitorial company, but he wants more.
``I'm not a lazy person," he said. ``I'll work."
For Christmas, the couple said they will have dinner at the Blue Dolphin restaurant, 502 S. Burdick St., which traditionally offers free meals to all who stop in or call for take-out service.
``Then we'll spend time at the drop-in (center)," Teresa Ibach said, referring to Ministry with Community, 440 N. Church St.
``Yeah, gifts are handed out at 10 (a.m.)" Michael Ibach said with a smile, dabbing a bit of gravy off his chin.
Volunteer Katie Pullen, hugging a toddler with a diamond-bright smile and half a roll in a pudgy fist, said she was ``blessed to be here and see all the smiling faces here."

Pullen went to high school with McNally and hadn't seen him in at least 20 years.
``I'm going to check out his church Christmas Day," she said. ``It just seems like this was all supposed to happen."
About 15 area businesses, churches and charities helped make Friday's event happen, including Pasta Pasta, Steak 'N Shake, London Grill, Gordon Food Service and Calvary Chapel of Kalamazoo Valley, McNally said.
``If everyone works together we can meet their needs," McNally said of homeless folks.

Hundreds of needy residents get a Christmas meal

Monday, December 26, 2005

MIKE THOMPSON
THE SAGINAW NEWS

A 50-year-old man who lives at the Restoration Community Outreach homeless shelter enjoyed a hearty meal during a Christmas feeding program at downtown Saginaw's First Congregational Church.

Then he had a hearty laugh when a volunteer announced that his ticket No. 61 was drawn to win a free fruit basket.

He laughed even harder when the volunteer turned the ticket upside down and joked, "That's 19, not 61."

"Homeless people have to have a sense of humor. Otherwise we couldn't survive," said the anonymous holiday diner.

He was among 400 who received full-course dinners from the church, the East Side Soup Kitchen and Cathedral District residents.

A pair of 13-year-olds did their best to help.

Benjamin D. Rene, a seventh-grader at White Pine Middle School, had a sore arm after toting pitchers of punch for nearly three hours from seat to seat. The son of John and Katie Rene joined his 15-year-old brother, Jeremy Rene, a 10th-grader at Heritage High School.

"It's a blessing for us, a way to help the less fortunate," Benjamin Rene said.

William Perez brought his trumpet to belt out some holiday tunes. The son of Victor A. Perez Sr. and Maria Perez of Zilwaukee is a seventh-grader at Zilwaukee International Studies School.

The teenager joined Audrey Beatty of New Covenant Christian Center on a version of Jingle Bells that caused the diners to clap and sing.

"Once you get into this," said Dave Diebold, a First Congregational volunteer, "what would Christmas be without it?"

Mike Thompson is a staff writer for The Saginaw News. Call him at 776-9691.

DN 12/23

IN OUR OPINION

Bedroom Privacy

Repeal intrusive state law banning cohabitation

You probably didn't even know it before this week, but there really is a law on the books in Michigan that outlaws shacking up. The 167-year-old statute, ridiculous by today's community standards, criminalizes "lewd and lascivious cohabitation," which means nearly 400,000 Michigan adults are breaking the law by living with their boyfriend or girlfriend.

Thankfully, the antiquated law has been practically unobserved and unenforced, at least until Oakland County Circuit Judge Daniel Patrick O'Brien invoked it in ordering a divorced father not to have overnight visitation with his children on nights his girlfriend slept over.

The American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan is appealing the order, which came at the request of Christian Muller's ex-wife, to the state Supreme Court. The order, regulating overnight visitation when unrelated guests of the opposite sex are present, applies to both Muller and his ex-wife.

Of course, Muller, 35, of Ferndale, could settle the matter by marrying his girlfriend — making it legal, so to speak. She now sleeps in a van parked in the driveway when Muller's two daughters, ages 5 and 7, visit on alternate weekends. But whether or not Muller remarries is none of the government's business.

Legislators ought to repeal this intrusive law, which has already earned Michigan unwelcome nationwide attention. A repeal would not sanction unmarried cohabitation. Rather, it would simply acknowledge that making it a criminal act exceeds the government's rightful authority, as most reasonable people would believe.

If necessary, the state Supreme Court should strike down this unconstitutional law, but legislators could save everyone a lot of trouble by sending this archaic statute straight to the shredder.

Sunday, December 25, 2005

Metro charity giving slows
Michigan's economic doldrums, donor fatigue cause shortfall despite the 'huge need here.'

Doug Guthrie / The Detroit News

At a time when the spirit of giving is abundant, storage racks are unusually bare inside the warehouses of Gleaners Community Food Bank of Southeastern Michigan.

Cash donations to the organization that supplies food to more than 400 Metro Detroit soup kitchens and social service agencies also are $561,000 behind expectations.

Many other local charities, including the Salvation Army and the United Way for Southeastern Michigan, are suffering an equally disappointing holiday. The dearth of giving is the result of a double blow. While other areas of the nation have emerged from economic doldrums, Michigan's continued losses in manufacturing have combined with a public that is tapped out after helping with dramatic national and international relief efforts, experts say

"That was the effect our disasters had on us. We had to go to some of our reserves to meet needs," said Ruth Ellen, vice president of development for the Gleaners. "Our food stocks are coming back to normal, but the monetary donations are still way off. We have a very generous community, but there is some donor fatigue, and a lot of our social service agencies are feeling it."

Following a record $284 billion year in 2004, big U.S. charities that are connected with disaster relief again have raked in donations this year, according to the Giving USA Foundation.

The Salvation Army raised $295 million nationwide for hurricane relief, compared with $86 million following the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. But the local Salvation Army Red Kettle Drive is 22 percent short of its $7 million goal to help the needy in Metro Detroit. Although the kettles and bell ringers come in from the cold on Christmas Eve, the Salvation Army will continue to accept donations through January.

"We are in the nation's poorest city, and there is no question that the need for resources is only becoming greater here," said Maj. Norman Marshall, the Salvation Army's eastern Michigan division commander.

The Salvation Army now feeds more than 7,000 people a day in Metro Detroit, up from 6,300 per day at this time last year at 14 centers and from mobile food distribution trucks. The organization operates overnight shelters and helps the needy pay gas and electric bills. The Salvation Army planned to give winter coats for Christmas to 10,000 Metro Detroit children, up 20 percent over last year.

"We are using cots that weren't needed before to handle the increasing number of people in our shelters," Marshall said. "Yet this same city was extraordinarily generous in supporting the efforts to help those affected by the tsunami and the hurricanes. But those donations were dedicated only to those efforts, not supporting our needs here."

Eastern Michigan Salvation Army received more than $3 million for tsunami relief and more than $5 million for the hurricanes. The organization sent 64 tractor-trailer loads of supplies to the Gulf Coast. It also sent funds for vouchers to allow evacuees to buy clothes.

"Our fear is that people simply will think that 'I already gave to the Salvation Army,' when there is still so much local need," Marshall said.
United Way for Southeastern Michigan missed its $66.5 million Torch Drive fund-raising goal last month by $3 million.
"There is a desperate need right now, especially among the organizations that aid the needy with shelter, food and assistance with utility bills," said Patricia Ellis, spokeswoman for United Way. "We were very grateful to get the $63.4 million in the economic climate we have here."
United Way has operated a help referral telephone center in Metro Detroit since 1949. The center got 34,000 calls last year. Based on the number of calls since a new 211 dial-for-help service started this fall, the center's director expects to field more than 140,000 calls next year.
"The trend was clear," said El Cabrel Lee, director of the center that takes calls from people in need in Macomb, Oakland and Wayne counties. Last December, the center took 3,786 calls. It has received more than 5,200 calls so far this month.
"Obviously, there is a huge need here, and it's growing," Lee said.

You can reach Doug Guthrie at (313) 222-2359 or dguthrie@detnews.com

How to donate
Gleaners Community Food
Bank of Southeastern Michigan
2131 Beaufait, Detroit, MI 48207
Donate online at: www.gcfb.org/donate.html
Salvation Army of Eastern
Michigan
16130 Northland Drive Southfield, MI 48075
Call: (877) 725-6424
Donate online at: www.usc.salvationarmy.org/usc/www_usc_emi.nsf
United Way of Southeastern Michigan
1212 Griswold Detroit, MI 48226
Donate online at: www.uwcs.org

More than ever, folks need your assistance

Livingston United Way says requests are up 15%

Monday, December 26, 2005

BY CASEY HANS
News Staff Reporter

Organizers of the 2005 Livingston County United Way campaign are making a final push to meet this year's fundraising goal of $1.6 million.
As of late last week, the annual giving campaign was at 80 percent of that goal.
The 2005 campaign funds 2006 programs and the need is expected to be greater than ever in the coming year, as more people request help for even the most basic services, said Livingston County United Way Executive Director Nancy Rosso.
"The statistics are showing a 15 percent increase in the number of people asking for help," said Rosso, who also sits on the county's Department of Human Services board of directors.
"We've never seen these kinds of numbers in the county before," she added.
She said local food banks also are seeing an "unprecedented increase in numbers" of people asking for help this fall.
"I guess it's a sign of the times," she said, adding that Michigan's poor economy has affected many who never had problems before.
United Way Development-Marketing Director Jeanne Clum said some of the county's middle class families are also suffering.
"There are multiple families that are affected," she said. "Our middle-class families are strapped so tightly that one more bill is going to push them over the edge."
Still, many continue to give even during tough economic times, she said.
Clum said she is confident the $320,000 needed to meet the goal will be reached in the first part of the new year.
"We have a lot of companies that run their campaigns late - some go into January," she said. "We're slightly ahead of last year."
With final tallies locally and reporting from out-of-county United Way chapters still several weeks away, a final report on campaign effort should be in hand by early February, she said.
In the coming weeks, United Way staff will follow up with businesses that still have campaigns open to help them finalize their efforts.
Clum said national and international needs with hurricanes Katrina and Rita and last year's tsunami in South Asia have taken the spotlight in recent months and many in the community have donated to these efforts.
It has had an impact on the campaign, she said. But despite these appeals, local residents and businesses have not forgotten the United Way.
"When you see this much need around the country and around the world, it makes people count their blessings," she said. "We see a really, really caring community here."
United Way programs served more than 89,000 Livingston County residents in the past year with everything from community wellness to programs that support area youth. Some United Way-

funded agencies include Livingston County Catholic Society Services, LACASA, the American Red Cross, the Oakland Livingston Human Services Agency and Big Brothers Big Sisters. Clum said the number of people served by Livingston County United Way programs grows each year.

Casey Hans can be reached at chans@livingstoncommunitynews
.com or at (810) 844-2005.

People help out one local family at a time

Saturday, December 24, 2005

By Jessi De La Cruz
jdelacruz@citpat.com -- 768-4918

Jackson-area businesses, schools and employee groups created Christmas for nearly 500 local families in the face of a sagging economy and higher living costs this holiday season.
Groups of people countywide bought presents, provided Christmas dinner and spread holiday cheer for needy families in a "business as usual" fashion despite a growing number of job layoffs and a higher cost of living.
Volunteer organizers say concerns of fewer donations this year were wiped away by the enthusiasm people showed to help others.
"I was worried with the economy we wouldn't get any money," said Lisa Tate, an East Jackson Middle School teacher who helped the school find a family to adopt. "The kids came through anyway."
The 400-student middle school raised $1,344 to spend on its adopted family through a four-day coin drive. The school was able to buy its adopted family of seven food for Christmas dinner, clothes, toys, bedding and a $300 Consumers Energy voucher for future heating costs.
Tate said the students were thrilled with how much money they raised.
"We have a lot of kids who are needy themselves," she said. "But when you ask for something small, people see they can do something for someone else."
The Salvation Army serves as the local matchmaker for those wishing to adopt families and those who need help. This year the nonprofit organization accepted 1,623 families for adoption, which is typical, said Virginia Fetterman, the Salvation Army director of social services.
Almost 500 families were adopted by local groups, and the rest were provided food and toys for Christmas by the Salvation Army.
Fetterman said she isn't surprised that people step up to help despite lean times.
"We have such a good community," she said. "When people know there is a bad time, they might decide to not buy for each other and go help a family instead."
Jackson Public Schools transportation department adopts a family from inside the school district every holiday. This year, the department donated more than 80 presents and loads of groceries to a family from Frost Elementary School.
Employees delivered the goods in a decorated school bus to the Jackson family with five children about a week ago.
"All they had in the living room was the tree," said Craig Frazier, the district's transportation supervisor. "It really warmed our hearts to do it."
Bus driver Angela Snyder was happy to wrap presents -- even the odd-shaped ones -- for the department's adopted family.
"It's a great feeling to have someone come to your door and give you Christmas," she said. "I know; I've been there."
The Jackson County Youth Center and the Jackson family court partner to hold an auction in early December every year and use that money to buy for their adopted family. This year employees raised $300 to supply Christmas to a Jackson family of seven.

The groups also held a canned food drive for their family.
"These are tougher economic times but I think the spirit of giving is as strong as ever," said Brian Philson, the youth center's director.
"It's a great combination of pulling staff together to help someone else and having a good time."
Employees in the finance and computer departments at LifeWays came together to provide Christmas for a single mom and her three children. People donated toys, clothes and food based on a list furnished by the family.
Finance department employee Joni Kamke said she has everything she needs and enjoys giving to others.
"I give people credit for signing up," she said. "And there are people who want to give. It goes full circle."

Christmas reminds us to remember the poor

Sunday, December 25, 2005

The Kalamazoo Gazette

In thousands of churches, last night and this morning, the words were read telling the story of a traveling Jewish couple who, because they could find no home or inn in which to stay, had to settle for the shelter of a stable, where the woman gave birth to a son.

We are reminded, through the Gospel of Luke, that at the root of the Christmas season is a story about the poorest, the meekest, the least of these. More than 2,000 years later, the Christmas story reminds us yearly that we still have the poorest among us.

Today, most of us will be in our warm homes, or the homes of loved ones, surrounded by mountains of wrapped gifts and sitting at tables groaning under the weight of holiday foods. Most will be celebrating Christmas. Many will be observing the first night of Hanukkah, after the sun sets.

But thousands of others will be at the Kalamazoo Gospel Mission or the Blue Dolphin restaurant or Ministry with Community or other organizations.

Most of them will be people who have no homes of their own, or who don't have the means to afford a holiday meal, or who are abysmally lonely on this holiday and don't want to spend it alone.

But many also will be volunteers who might be giving up a celebration with their own families -- or who may be facing the holiday alone for whatever reason and want to make the day more meaningful by devoting it to others.

The Blue Dolphin restaurant in Kalamazoo, which has been serving free Christmas Day meals for 28 years, will prepare enough food to serve 2,000 people. Two hundred volunteers will cook and serve those who come to the Dolphin between noon and 4 p.m., or drive people who can't get there on their own, or deliver meals on request.

The Kalamazoo Gospel Mission is having a Christmas celebration that will include gifts for both long-term and short-term residents. The Gospel Mission has 217 beds, the lion's share of beds for the homeless in Kalamazoo County, and can have as many as 250 people sleeping there, sometimes on mats in the hallways.

And at Ministry with Community, a day program for homeless and low-income people, 750 gift packages containing hats, gloves, socks and flannel shirts or other warm items are waiting to be handed out to the hundreds who will come to observe the holidays.

The holidays are an important time to remember that not everyone has a place to call his or her own; not everyone has a pantry full of food. Organizations like the Gospel Mission or Ministry with Community are often awash with donations and volunteers during the month of December. But after New Year's Day, the poorest among us are often forgotten by the rest of us.

Those who donated money or gifts or who volunteered today to make this holiday less bleak for many others deserve our gratitude. The people who give of their time and gifts on Christmas Day are typically providing charity to others throughout the year.

The rest of us should resolve to help them out in 2006.

Published December 25, 2005

[From the Lansing State Journal]

Scott: Charities need aid beyond holidays Global and local pressures severe; please join cause

The tsunami that devastated South Asia and the hurricanes that tore through our Gulf Coast this year are still being felt in Lansing every day. The Salvation Army continues to meet the needs of those victimized by these disasters.

In the wake of hurricanes Katrina and Wilma, local Salvation Army relief trucks and teams of local volunteers were sent to Texas. Volunteers from this area continue to rotate through the Gulf Coast to help hurricane survivors. Mid-Michigan's outpouring of donations to support these efforts is dramatic and appreciated.

But there are also people right here who need ongoing help that the Salvation Army and other area non-profits struggle to provide.

The economic challenges facing mid-Michigan are great. Layoffs in the auto industry and their resulting ripple effect are straining an already stressed nonprofit safety net. This pressure, coupled with the financial drain from these major national and international disasters, is making 2005 a year that will test the support agencies. But those challenges are also opportunities.

This holiday season alone, the Salvation Army has been processing help for more than 3,000 applicants seeking food, housing, utility or other assistance programs. The applications have exceeded last year's pace by at least 400 people. The needs for food and shelter are acute.

Adults understand the realities of tough economic times. Children in need only know that they are hungry or that there are no gifts during the holidays. As the Salvation Army prepared for the annual Angel Tree projects, the number of people applying for food and children's gifts through the program was as high as 25 percent ahead of last year.

No one was turned away, and deserving children will get holiday gifts. We are confident that generous donors will help us meet the challenges of this holiday season and beyond.

Local nonprofit agencies, including the Salvation Army, are dedicated to helping the people in mid-Michigan. The assistance may be a hot meal, clean clothes, a warm bed or permanent housing.

Since 1884, the Salvation Army has been in Lansing assisting those in need. Never has the number of people seeking help been greater. Likewise, never has the Salvation Army's commitment to the community been greater.

Maj. Robert Scott is capital area commander for the Salvation Army.

Volunteers guarantee warmer winter for hundreds of children

FLINT JOURNAL LETTER TO THE EDITOR

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION
Monday, December 26, 2005

JOURNAL READER

On the morning of Dec. 14, there was a frenzy of activity at the Zimmerman Center as volunteers gathered together with the common goal of sorting and organizing the hundreds of pairs of shoes, socks, hats and gloves for the many children of Flint.
Through the generosity of our three local hospitals - Genesys, Hurley and McLaren - and their staffs, the mounds of items were made available to create gift packages for this holiday season.
I would like to thank everyone who was involved in the "Shoes That Fit" project, from the organizers to the donators to the volunteers. Because of them all, many children will have a nicer holiday season and a warmer winter.

Walter Milton Jr., superintendent
Flint School District

Local News

Salvation Army meets, exceeds goal

Kathie Marchlewski, Midland Daily News 12/27/2005

Not all of the nickels, dimes and quarters dropped into Salvation Army buckets this season have been counted, but Midland's Major Pat McPherson said that the 2005 goal -- a number than had seemed a long shot -- has been met.

Midlanders dropped more than $100,000 into the red kettles posted at area storefronts and manned by bell ringers since November.

"I'm thinking Saturday we hit it," McPherson said, adding that he expects the total, after all of the change is counted, will be between $103,000 and $104,000.

"This year everyone worked," McPherson said. "It was a great thing to achieve. The community really backed us."

And the community will need the campaign's support in the upcoming year. For agencies that refer families to the Salvation Army for assistance year-round, it is a relief to know funding will be available.

First Call for Help is one of those agencies. It refers people to the Army for things like utility, heat and rent assistance when they get shut-off or eviction notices.

"It does make a difference," Amy Olson, First Call For Help coordinator, said of the successful campaign.

With increased utility rates and other economical pressures, First Call is already seeing increases in need.

"Our rent calls have really gone up," Olson said. "People pay their heat and can't pay their rent, or pay their rent and can't pay their heat."

While the Salvation Army's holiday campaign has drawn to a close, people can give anytime. For more information on giving, or on assistance, call 496-2787.

Other area Army reports:

* Saginaw Salvation Army Corps. also had a successful year. Its office reports giving totaling $195,000 -- $10,000 over the goal. Its ringers set up at 30 store locations.

- The Bay City arm of the Army did not fare as well this holiday season. The office reports giving of $37,500 as of Thursday, with the final two days yet to be counted. Its goal was also $100,000, but is likely to fall short.

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Published December 25, 2005

Good will: Compassion, small acts of kindness are what keep us together

A Lansing State Journal editorial

Even from the relative safety of mid-Michigan, it's impossible to escape the waves of human misery experienced in 2005.

A catastrophic tsunami. Devastating hurricanes and earthquakes. Terrorist attacks. U.S. soldiers returning to their hometowns in flag-draped coffins.

If this were the full story, only the strongest hearts would withstand the grief.

But, of course, it is not the full story.

In great and small ways, the world has seen a record outpouring of compassion, money, supplies and volunteer labor after nature has done its worst.

When one of our own fell on the battlefield, people in small towns like Portland lined the streets to pay honor and to comfort the grieving families.

And then there are the less spectacular but no less real miseries of daily life. Homelessness and hunger top the list in our community. Living among us are an estimated 700 people with no permanent roof over their heads. Many of them are children.

And those who do have homes struggle to put food on the table and keep those homes warm.

But again, that is not the full story. Thank goodness there are places like Loaves and Fishes, the Volunteers of America, the Lansing City Rescue Mission and the Salvation Army that step in and do the hard work of catching people who have slipped through society's safety net.

And thank heavens for the Greater Lansing Food Bank and all of the various food pantries that appeal successfully to our generosity, thus feeding thousands of people. And trust us, our generosity is needed as never before. The food bank is feeding nearly 5,000 people each month, up from 4,400 a year ago at this time.

When this community responds to human need, we make a big fuss about it, and we do so without apology. As we cast a necessary light on misery, we should also take pains to acknowledge the compassion that always follows in misery's wake.

And let's not forget those small, random acts of kindness that are part of the ebb and flow of daily life. People opening doors for senior citizens or mothers with babies. Someone stopping to help a stranded motorist. Saying hello to a stranger.

Most of these acts go largely unnoticed, not rating a headline. Here's one act that did:

At Capital City Airport recently, a woman on her way to visit a critically ill sister held a ticket bought by the sister's husband.

The man wasn't available to verify the credit card transaction, so the woman was without a ticket and had no money to buy one.

What happened next, as related by the LSJ's John Schneider, was what you'd call a minor Christmas miracle. A man step forward and offered to apply his frequent flyer points for the woman's round trip ticket. And, after learning the woman planned to driver her sister's four children back to Lansing, the man used more frequent flier points to buy tickets for the children as well.

Kindness, great and small, is the glue that holds us together.

Use glue.

Merry Christmas.