

Christian Service Center completes 30 years of service to area families



Helen Hague, Hazel Krywanski, and Ardith Fuller of the First Baptist Church, along with Margaret Seidelman, trustee, help sort the many items brought in to the Christian Service Center on Jackson and Adams Streets. The Center has been open for 30 years, and sees 50 to 60 families each day it is open.

IONIA — Completing its 30th year in Ionia, Margaret Seidelman says the Christian Service Center is still "the best kept secret in Ionia."

The service center, located at the corner of Jackson and Adams Streets, has been serving families and individuals with clothing, bedding, some furniture and other items since 1958.

Seidelman, a trustee of the Christian Service Center, said that she has been a part of the project since it began.

"It was located out by what used to be the county farm, and is now in the new [state] park," she said. "We purchased this house in 1968."

"We" means the women of Church Women United, who in 1968, held a big drive to raise enough money, approximately \$4,500 Seidelman remembers, to purchase the house.

Now, Seidelman said they are outgrowing the current center, and are considering building a new facility, or moving into a new location.

"This house is now appraised at approximately \$22,000. We've made a lot of improvements. If we get that much for it, we could use it as a good down payment," she said.

Thirty years ago, the center was open one day a month, when government commodities were distributed. Now, it is open three days a week, Tuesday and Wednesday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., and Saturday from 9 a.m. to 12 noon.

The shelves are neatly stacked, with volunteer workers constantly sorting new items coming in each day, deciding whether to keep it, throw it in the trash, or to give it to the Salvation Army.

Items that are kept are ones that will likely be used quickly, are in good condition, or with a quick wash and dry, can be returned to good condition. Some items are just not usable, according to Seidelman.

"People should realize that some things should not be brought to the center, because if they are garbage, then we have to pay to have it

brought to the dump," she said. Seidelman gave a recent example of a mattress which was left at the center. It was ripped, and the coils were exposed.

"No one could use that mattress, and now it sits here until we can have it hauled away," she said. If there is a question as to the usefulness of an item, someone could call the center during open hours and ask the volunteers.

The items that are still good, but not useful for Ionia's center, are packaged for the Salvation Army truck, which picks up items once a week.

The three rooms on the main floor have tables and shelves labeled with sizes, and according to men, women, and children. The second floor has four rooms, which each store summer clothing, winter clothing, and a "special needs" room which contains items for families who have been burned out of their home and have nothing left.

In the basement are shoes and men's clothing.

In 1988, the Christian Service Center was open 150 days, serving 786 families. Included in these families, Seidelman reports, were 1,146 children, 36 single men, 21 single women, 27 recorded senior citizens.

Layettees are made up for women who are expectant mothers, and include a "starter kit" with diapers, rubber pants, infant shirts, sleepers, socks, booties, sweaters, coveralls, and blankets.

Items are counted as they are distributed, and last year 59,161 items were given out. "In addition," she said, "at least that many were shipped to the Salvation Army in Grand Rapids and stored for seasonal use."

The center not only serves families in the Ionia area, but also transients. The families came from,

according to last year's report, 31 towns in Michigan, and from Maine, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Florida. Families from Ionia numbered 456 last year, with 81 from Belding; 49 from Saranac; 28 from Orleans; 23 from Lyons; 23 from Muir; 17 from Portland; 13 from Palo; 12 from Fenwick; 11 each from Greenville and Lake Odessa; 10 from Stanton; five from Sheridan, Carson City and Clarksville; four from Hubbardson, Lakeview, Lowell, Smyrna and Sunfield; two from Battle Creek, Grandville, Six Lakes, Jackson and Cadillac. Pewamo, Sumner, Lansing, Wyoming, Owosso, and Crys-

tal each had one family visit the center.

"Sometimes we think that certain people are there each time the door is open, but that's not quite true," said Seidelman. The majority of the number of families, 322, visited the center only once last year.

Volunteers are the cornerstone of the service center. One hundred and sixteen volunteers from 11 area churches and some with no church affiliation who want to help out donated 2,513 hours last year.

On the average, 50-60 families visit the center each day it is open, and one volunteer remembered

giving 700 items out in one day.

"What goes fast are the children's clothing, especially sleepers," she said. "We also have a great need for bedding, beds, dressers, tables and chairs."

Anyone is invited to the center if they need anything, Seidelman said. "We don't ask questions here. If someone needs something, they can take it. Even the people from the community theater came down to use some of our clothing, and they said they would bring it back when they were done."

Volunteers are also needed, and anyone interested should call Seideman at 527-3568.