

Westminster House To Note 8-Decade Tradition of Aid

By HENRY D. LOCKE JR.

In 1894, the Westminster Community House was established to administer relief to 55 German families. On Sunday, the facility will celebrate its 80th anniversary still providing needed services to area residents.

Although the makeup of the neighborhood has changed from a predominantly German community to a predominantly black community now, available programs there are still geared to the human needs of the residents.

Mrs. Carolyn B. Thomas, interim director of the center who has supervised the planning of the celebration, expects hundreds of persons who "had pride in our past and faith in our future," to attend the anniversary program from 2 to 5 Sunday afternoon.

Backed by Church

The center, originally financially supported by Westminster Presbyterian Church, 724 Delaware, until 1965 when the Presbyterian of Western New York joined in with financial support, is now supported by the United Way of Buffalo and Erie County.

When the center was founded, the purpose was to help ease the burden of the Charity Aide Society, which was faced with a grave depression problem at that time.

Various programs offered throughout the past 80 years also have been, to make the financial burden lighter on other social agencies. But mainly, the programs were designed to provide better and needed services

to the residents of that community.

Mrs. Thomas said most of the program participants reside in the area bounded by Broadway, Fillmore, Jefferson Ave., and generally the Kensington Expressway.

Free Breakfasts

About 80 grade school and junior high school students receive free breakfasts in the facility each morning before going to school. This program was started by the Black Student Union at the University of Buffalo in 1969.

The meals are paid for with money received from the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture (USDA). In

addition, some surplus foods, such as frozen orange juice, grapefruit juice, dried milk, peanut butter, flour, oatmeal, rice, ground beef and canned chicken also were provided by USDA.

The meals are prepared by Mrs. Alice Reed community volunteer, including mothers of children in the program, serve the meals and clean up the Holmes Room, where the meals are served each school morning.

Limited Incomes

Mrs. Thomas noted that the meals are made available because the area consists of families with low and limited incomes she said.

In addition, about 70 senior citizens are served free hot lunches five days a week in the center. Elderly persons who are unable to travel to the center each day to eat their meals, receive their meals from a community volunteer who delivers them.

Aaron Page, community development specialist for the Westminster House, devotes 10 per cent of his time administering the senior citizen program.

Funds for that program also are provided by the USDA, through the Office of the Aging on Delaware Ave.

Head Start

The center also offers a Head Start program for about 30 preschool students through the Task Force of Cooperative Urban Ministry, located in Grace United Church of Christ, E. Delavan and Moselle St.

That religious group also operates a Wider Horizons Tutorial Reading Program each school day from 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. for grade school children who have difficulties in reading. Most of the students come from nearby School 41 at 641 Jefferson Ave., but Mrs. Thomas said students from other nearby schools also participate in the program.

Also found in the center is a Planned Parenthood outreach program, operated by Planned

Parenthood of Buffalo Inc. Times for Sessions

Those sessions are held on Tuesday and Thursday afternoon from 1 to 5 p.m. and Monday evenings from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. It has been in operation for seven years, and is one of the first planned parenthood outreach station in Buffalo.

The Erie County Health Dept. also operates an outreach station in the center. Persons from that office spend mornings in the center, but in the afternoon, they go from door to door to find persons who may need medical assistance. They then refer them to the appropriate health agency.

The center also operates an extensive recreation and group counseling program to teach youths to relate to their peer groups more effectively. Mrs. Thomas said much of their counselors' efforts is used to aid youths who experience stress and strain that they feel can be corrected through counseling.

Recreation

The recreation programs include basketball, baseball, boxing and other gymnasium activities. The gym, Mrs. Thomas noted, still has the original floor used when recreational and athletic programs were begun in 1896.

A camp program that began in the center during the summer and at Angola on the Lake. Westminster Presbyterian Church donated its former camp site to the center last year. Mrs. Thomas said they have scheduled family and group outings for each weekend during the winter months at the camp site in Angola.

Employees from the Task Force of Urban Ministry and the Neighborhood Youth Corps, a job development program, help to staff the camp programs.

Plaque Planned

Mrs. Thomas said that in addition to celebrating the center's anniversary, they will unveil a plaque in the honor of Miss Elizabeth A. Roblin, executive director of the center from 1933 to 1965, when she retired. She died two weeks ago.

Many community volunteers, including Mrs. Willa Polmar, who earlier this year organized youths and cleaned the streets after the area went uncleaned

for an extended period of time have joined in the planning of the celebration.

The Rev. Thomas Stewart pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church, the founding church, will review some high lights of the center.

Wade Russell is general chairman, Mrs. Mamye Workman is cochairman, Mrs. Jane Morris, principal of School 41, is chairman of historical research and James C. Jackson is publicity chairman.

Other contributors are Mrs. Geneva Scruggs, Mrs. Ruth Williams, Mrs. Ora Lee Lewis, Miss Lorayne Simmons, group worker, Thurman Leigh, program director, and Miss Trina Perry, a youth volunteer.

Black Student

Union

Paper CEX p 19

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