

RPC volunteers join forces to open psych center gift shop

By Teresa A. Parsons
 Why don't state hospitals have gift shops? That's not a trivia question — it's what volunteer visitors to the Rochester Psychiatric Center (RPC) found themselves asking last year.

Consequently, the RPC's longest-lived group of patient advocates is cooperating with one of the center's newest organizations to welcome visitors with a less-forsboding and more-hospitable entrance. This fall the Friends of the RPC and volunteers from LILAC — Life in Institutions, Loving and Caring — hope to open the Lilac Friends Gift Shoppe in the foyer of the Medical and Surgical Building, thereby razing one more barrier between Rochester's community hospitals and its "mental institution."

"State institutions don't have gift shops. All other hospitals do," said Dan Sapirstone, president of the Friends of RPC. "There is no place where visitors and patients can buy sundries."

No one argues that the hospital couldn't function without one, but the benefits expected from the gift shop are more than trivial. Organizers believe it will improve

relations between staff, patients and visitors, and boost morale all around. A sign of hospitality to outsiders, it will stimulate patients by giving them something new to watch. Visitors will have the chance to pick up a gift for a relative or friend, and likewise patients will be able to buy items, either for themselves or as gifts, that would otherwise be unavailable. Eventually, some patients could even use the shop as a job training opportunity.

Ellen Clouser, a LILAC volunteer for the past three years, believes anything would be an improvement. "It's a very unpleasant place to walk into. There's just nothing attractive about it... it's very depressing with just benches sitting around," she said.

Not only is the gift shop a first for a state institution, according to Robert Tannenbaum, associate director for community services at the RPC, but so is the degree of cooperation between diverse organizations. Last fall, representatives from both volunteer groups and the RPC's administration formed a committee to study the feasibility of a gift shop. They were responding to the suggestions of several LILAC volunteers,

who, at a May 1984 Volunteer Appreciation Dinner, questioned how the center's atmosphere could and should be brightened. The committee looked at other hospital gift shops, studied proposed locations and designs, and researched legal and financial considerations.

The results of the study won the blessing of the center's administration, which will provide space for the shop. RPC officials have also asked the state to fund the necessary renovations to the lobby. Their request is now before officials in Albany, and Tannenbaum terms its chances "hopeful." With state approval, the renovations could be completed in about 90 days.

Staff members already provide volunteer training and orientation and will handle security for the shop.

Last May, the Friends of RPC board of directors voted to lend the organizations' corporate identity and established reputation to the project. The board also agreed to be the body ultimately accountable for the shop.

LILAC, an outgrowth of a program established in 1982 by St. Joseph's parish in

Penfield, will recruit and supply volunteers to staff the shop. The program's sponsoring agency, Catholic Charities of the Genesee Valley Office of Social Ministry, has provided staff assistance with fund raising as well as recruitment. The Gannett Foundation has already approved a \$2,500 grant to purchase inventory, according to Bill Privett, associate director for Catholic Charities.

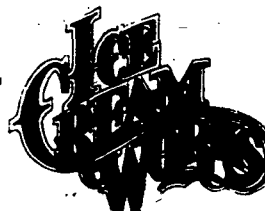
A host of other volunteers have been involved. McQuaid Jesuit High School students conducted a marketing study among patients, visitors and staff to determine what the shop should stock. A retired executives' organization, ESCOR, has lent its management expertise to the study, as have members of the Monroe Community Hospital Auxiliary.

Between now and opening day, LILAC must recruit additional volunteers to staff the shop. Shop managers, a bookkeeper, a purchaser and 25 volunteer clerks are needed. Anyone interested should call Nancy Brone at the Genesee Valley Office of Social Ministry, (716)546-4894, or Zozo Laird at RPC, (716)473-3230, ext. 1529.


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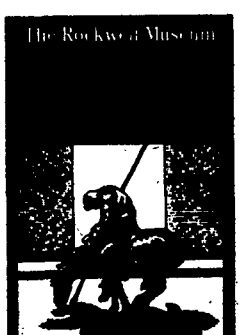

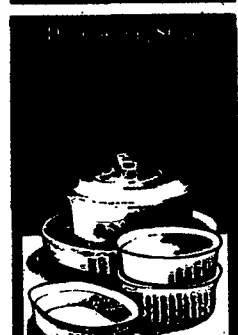

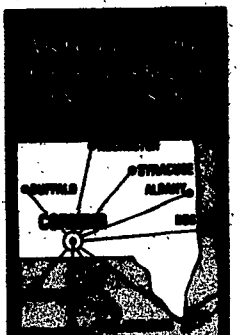
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