

Food bank will cover costs with charges, fund raising

By Mike Myers

Beginning July 1, the Southern Tier Community Food Bank will charge its member agencies seven cents per pound for the food they need.

This "maintenance charge" will cover half of the food bank's operating expenses, according to David Biviano, chairman of the food bank's advisory council. The council will raise the remaining half of the costs through community fund raising.

The advisory council has been working on the food bank's funding problem of funding since late last year. Funds from grants and other sources failed to materialize, calling into question the survival of the food bank.

A fund drive to keep the food bank alive until June 30 was started, while the question of a regular source of future funding for was discussed by the advisory council.

At a March meeting, some member agencies bitterly protested the proposal that they

would be charged for the food they receive. Some claimed they would be unable to pay any charges.

Biviano said one fundamental concept emerged from the council discussions. "Our purpose is to act as a supplier for agencies already in existence. They have their sources of funding." He noted that food pantries, soup kitchens and other agencies distributing food to the poor buy some of their food at retail prices. "Considering that," Biviano said, "seven cents a pound seems reasonable."

He noted that the 15-person advisory council will raise half of the food bank's the budget. If each of the more than 100 member agencies put 10 people to work raising the agency's share, 1,000 workers would be available, he said.

Biviano said that council had discussed at least eight plans, ranging from supporting the food bank operation entirely through

community support to relying entirely on maintenance charges from member agencies.

"This seemed a middle-of-the-road position," he explained. "This does not need to be permanent. If we find we can raise a greater amount from the community fund raising, it would be reflected in a decreasing maintenance fee. The maintenance fee was not desired. We saw it as necessary, but hopefully temporary."

The policy was put into the form of a motion by the board of directors of the Southern Tier Office of Social Ministry (STOSM), which is the parent agency of the food bank. According to Peter Ladley of STOSM, "this motion is going to be placed in the hands of all the providers. We've got to see how many will in fact contract with us for the next fiscal year."

Neither Biviano nor Ladley could predict how many agencies would not sign up for the new fiscal year beginning July 1, 1986. "It's

certainly possible we will lose some member agencies, but we actually hope all will be on board," Ladley said.

Biviano said that no budget for 1986/87 has been established yet. Ladley noted that participation has been increasing, but also noted that the increasing participation has been based on no charge for the food distributed.

Ladley had earlier discussed a possible budget of \$125,000, but Biviano now reports that "If there is shrinking participation, there is no need for that kind of a budget. We will set the budget accordingly."

Following a directive from Second Harvest, the national network that provides free food, the member agencies will be required to submit proof of their non-profit status under the Internal Revenue service code. Biviano said the food bank will help member agencies with the paper work needed to document their non-profit status.

Melita House

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different ethnic groups. When I was afraid about childbirth, they reassured me."

Friends who meet at Melita learn to respect others who make choices different from their own.

Debra and Mary, who became close during their pregnancies, delivered their babies on the same day. The afternoon that Debra went into labor, Mary was watching her, fearful about when her own time would come. That night, Mary was awakened by contractions.

"That was quite a morning," said Sister Jane. "No sooner had I put up a banner saying 'It's a boy' for Debra, I got the call that Mary had had a girl. So I put up another banner!" Debra gave birth at 5:20 a.m. and Mary at 10:20 a.m.

Debra had arranged for a private adoption and asked if she could give the baby to his new parents at Melita. "She and her parents brought him here an hour and a half before the ceremony," said Sister Jane. "They dressed him in a beautiful outfit and brought a box of diapers to give the adoptive couple. "The parents were trying to glue

themselves together, but Debra was very composed. We walked next door to St. Michael's Church and met the couple, who were trembling. They had wanted a baby for eight years and had almost given up hope.

"Debra put the baby in the other woman's arms. The man was so gentle; he asked Deb if she wanted to leave first, or should they?"

"While we were walking back to Melita, Mary returned from the hospital carrying her new daughter. She had come to pack her things to move out. Debra said, 'I have to go and see Mary's baby.' She held the baby and said how beautiful she was."

Debra has returned to Pennsylvania and enrolled in a community college. Mary and her baby moved in with a married couple to ease the new mother and her baby through the first few months.

"I know I made the right decision every day when I look at my daughter," said Mary. "But girls who give their babies up for adoption make the right decision, too, because they know they wouldn't be happy any other way."

"It hurt Debra very much. She took a lot of pictures of her baby because she knew she'd never see him again. She realized it would be hard to get over him, but she knew

she could have another child later."

Twenty percent of Melita's guests relinquish their babies, compared with national statistics of only four percent.

If there is any pressure at Melita about whether to keep or relinquish the baby, it comes from the guests themselves, said Sister Jane. "When a girl says she's going to put her baby up for adoption, the others say, 'How can you do that? Don't you love your baby?' But the staff encourages each guest to make that decision for herself; she, more than anyone else, will have to live with the consequences."

Anna was cautious when she first heard about Melita because she feared they would try to change her decision to keep her baby. "I was an adopted child; my mother went to Father Baker's to have me. I always had the impression that homes for unwed mothers talked the girls into giving up their babies. But I was impressed by the sisters' lack of pressure on that issue. They gave advice when I asked for it, and supported me in my decision."

Like Mary, Beverly was not confident about her parenting skills at the beginning. "I was too scared to find my own apartment and be on my own with a new baby. Melita

helped me find a home with an older woman. We shared only the kitchen, but I felt safe knowing she was downstairs."

When her daughter was two years old, Beverly married and had a son. She now works in a nursing home and has almost completed a degree in human services at Monroe Community College. "It's great to be off welfare," she says.

"Some girls accomplish so much with so little," said Sister Jane. "Many times we've seen a girl do much more with her limited resources than her parents have done with theirs."

"I am constantly amazed at the resilience of the human spirit," she added. "We expect the girls to act responsibly at a time when they are in constant upheaval. Time and time again, we've seen them rise to the occasion."

Melita House provides the only long-term residence for pregnant women between Buffalo and Albany. They welcome women of every creed, color, and social class. Staffed by the Sisters of Mercy, the house exists largely on the contributions of parishes and individuals. For the third year, Melita can be designated as the recipient of United Way contributions.

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