

Temple crew provides break for shelter staff

By Richard A. Kiley

Christmas is a special time for those who can be home for the holidays.

But what about the people who don't have a home to go to, or a family to share the joys of the season with? For them, Christmas is a particularly depressing time when the reality of their situation hits home even harder.

Catholic volunteers who staff the three parish shelters in Rochester are fully aware that homelessness does not take a holiday. Thanks to the support of the Rochester Jewish community, however, many of these volunteers can spend Christmas Eve with their own families while others care for the shelter clients.

For the past three years, Arthur Herz and 15 members of Temple B'rith Kodesh have relieved Catholic volunteers from aiding the homeless for one night. The idea of periodically spelling Catholic volunteers from their work at the shelters was spearheaded by Michael Schnittman.

"We know this is a high holiday for them (the Catholic volunteers), and we want to help them out," said Herz, who settled in Rochester in 1939 after escaping from Nazi Germany. "We are trying to do something for the hungry and the homeless just like them."

Relieving Catholics of their duties so they can observe the Christmas holiday is nothing new to Herz, who remembers doing the same for Christian soldiers during World War II.

"In between maneuvers and training, we very frequently stood guard for the Catholic boys," Herz said. "We did it all the time."

This Christmas Eve, Herz will be the acting co-director of the shelter, making sure everyone from the greeters to the food servers knows what he or she is doing.

"Right now, I'm trying to organize the group (of Jewish volunteers) so everybody doesn't bring fruit salad," Herz said. "There is a fair amount of continuity in the operation there ... it makes it easier on us."

Herz takes the responsibility of running the shelter for one night quite seriously. He stops in a week before Christmas Eve to make sure nothing new has been added to the shelter.

"I used the van they have there my first year, but I don't want to use it this year," said Herz, who added he will use his own car to transport guests to St. Bridget's shelter this year.

Herz said he has a tremendous amount of respect for volunteers who staff the parish shelter at Blessed Sacrament.

"Doris Cohen is the backbone of the kitchen work, and Roosevelt (Rice) does a superb job of keeping things clean and tidy," Herz said. "I have an enormous amount of respect for what they do there."

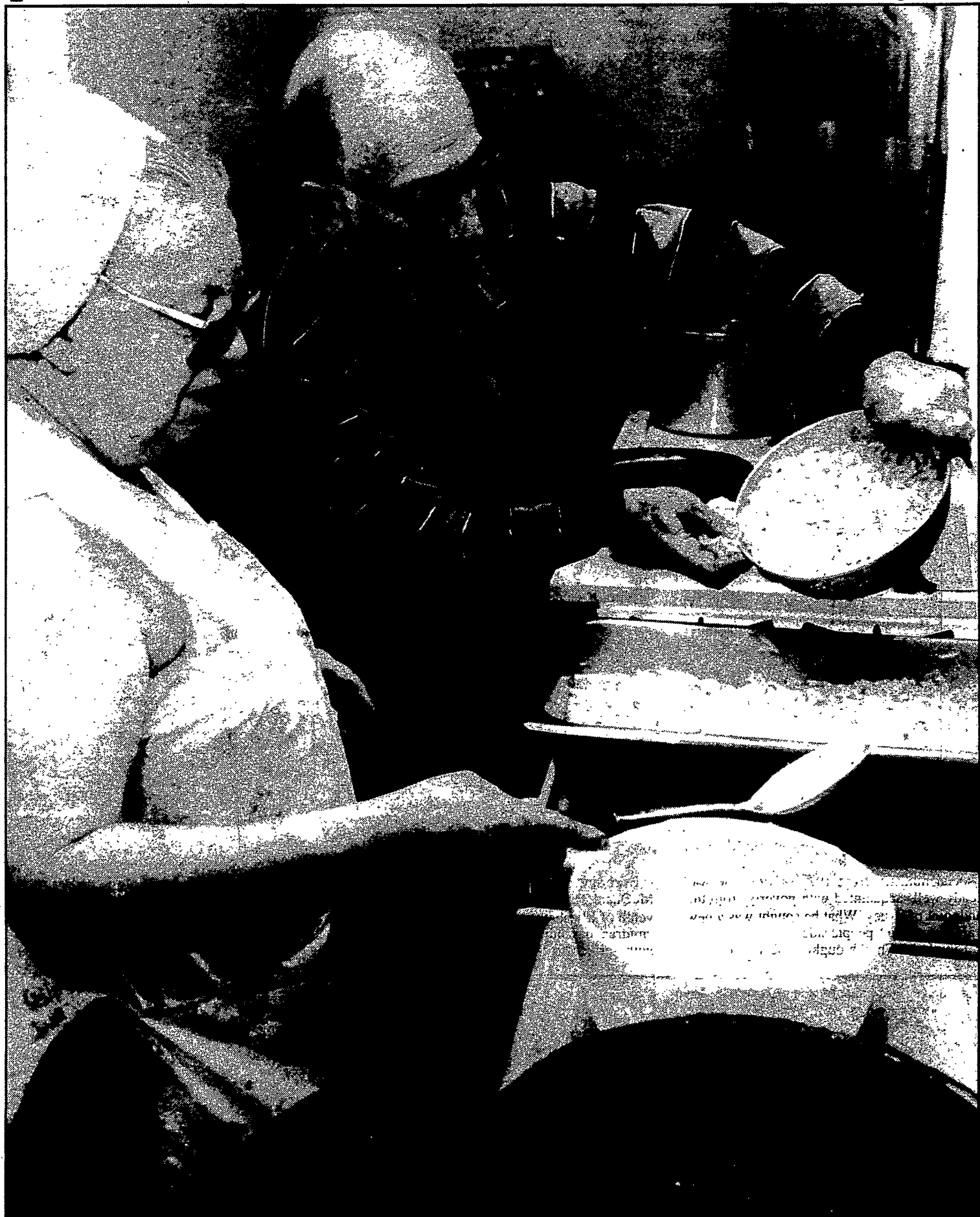
Cohen appreciates the much-needed break the Jewish volunteers provide for the shelter's regular staff.

"Thank God they do this," said Cohen, who is the food director at the Blessed Sacrament shelter. "You're about a month-and-a-half into the season and you're tired. It's the break we need. I'm really looking forward to it."

Dick Sadowski, who is co-director of the Monroe Avenue shelter, said he is impressed with the sincerity of the Jewish volunteers.

"The guests really appreciate them. They are very knowledgeable about what they do, and they are very caring to the people," said Sadowski, who is in his first season as co-director of the shelter. "Arthur comes in and sees what the operation is like, so he remembers how to do things."

"And it's not like we have to contact them yearly. They contact us," Sadowski added. "They say, 'This is your high holiday,' and we really want to help you out."



Linda Dow Hayes, Courier-Journal

Arthur Herz assists Blessed Sacrament Shelter food coordinator Doris Cohen in making a batch of macaroni and cheese for shelter residents. Herz is one of approximately 15 members of Temple B'rith Kodesh who volunteer their time on Christmas Eve to give regular shelter workers a much needed rest.

Program seeks help

Meals-on-Wheels, which delivers meals to the homebound or disabled, is in urgent need of volunteers during the holiday season. Those who would like to volunteer should call Christine Wallington, director of volunteers for the Visiting Nurse Service, at 716/482-0120.



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