

Appeal monies help family seek better future

By Lee Strong
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — In May, 1989, the Jimenez family was trapped in a nightmare.

Just a few weeks earlier, Ramiro and Maria Jimenez and their seven children were living in Texas. They were offered jobs as migrant workers in New York state, and were told that — as part of the job — they would have use of a home. The Jimenezes had to leave immediately, though.

The couple decided to move to New York, Maria said, because so few jobs were available in Texas.

"There was very little work, and they hired people from Mexico," explained Maria, a native of Texas. "They could pay them less."

So Ramiro and Maria packed their children into a small car, leaving little room for extra clothing and no furniture. Meanwhile, Maria — who had to do all the driving — was seven months pregnant.

When they arrived at the farm near Brockport, the Jimenezes discovered that their new home was a small trailer. And then they were told that they couldn't stay long because their children — all under eight years of age at the time — were too young to work. In addition, the Jimenezes found out that, under state regulations, their family was too large to live in the trailer.

Forced to leave the trailer with no money, the Jimenezes were desperate.

"It was terrible," Maria said. "We didn't know where we were going to, and we couldn't go back to Texas. We just wanted to work."

Their quest for assistance eventually led to the Catholic Family Center's Rehousing Assistance Program. The program — which has helped more than 200 families find housing in the past year — uses funds



The Jimenez family — (from left, first row) Alicia, Pedro, Delia, Gladys, (second row) Juan, Ramiro Jr., Ramiro Sr., Maria and Veronica — gather in their Rochester home.



Pedro Jimenez peers through the stair railing in his new home, which — unlike the family's previous dwellings — has a bathroom and more than one room.

from the Catholic Courier-Social Ministry Christmas Appeal to help meet emergency needs not met through regular-assistance programs.

The Jimenez family clearly qualified for emergency assistance, according to Nan Morgan, a housing consultant case manager with the CFC program. Morgan helped the Jimenezes get public assistance and find emergency housing.

In addition to providing the family with emergency food, she also helped locate furniture and appropriate clothing for the Jimenezes. Morgan also helped enroll the children in schools.

But the family's woes continued. Suffering from complications due to her pregnancy, Maria was unable to work very much. That meant Ramiro would have to take on more of the child-care duties.

Meanwhile, because they were living in Rochester, the Jimenezes had to get up at 5 a.m. every day to arrive for work on time.

Adding to their difficulties, Maria was unable to return to the house after the baby was born because it was infested with bats and the Department of Social Services would not allow the family to have a newborn in the house.

Forced to move, they later lost their next home because of housing code violations.

Finally, Morgan found the Jimenezes another house. This time, the family's fortune changed. The landlord arranged for Ramiro — who does not speak English — to work part-time at a department store. That job may become full-time.

"My husband is not the kind of man who

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Veronica, the newest member of the Jimenez family, was born in Rochester last year.

wants to stay at the house," Maria explained. "He needs to be doing something."

As soon as Ramiro settles into his full-time job, Maria said she plans to look for work as well. Despite the problems they've had, the couple wants to remain in Rochester, she said.

"I said, 'I'm not going to go back (to Texas) and go through all this again,'" Maria said. "I've got to stay for the children."

Maria noted that the house they are currently living in is far better than their previous home in Texas. "We can take baths," she explained. "It's a lot warmer. There's a bathroom. There's more than one room."

In addition, Maria, who has a 10th-grade education, said she is impressed by the schools in Rochester. She hopes that a good education will keep her children from the hardships she has faced.

"I'm concerned that they get some college or some training so they won't be migrant workers," Maria said. "You can only make a little bit of money and take it back to Texas and wait for the radio to say there's jobs."

Grateful for the help the family has received, Maria tries to help other migrant workers who have come up from the southwest and Mexico by serving as a translator.

As for the help they received from the Catholic Family Center's rehousing program, Maria simply said, "Without that, we would have just folded our hands. We could do nothing."

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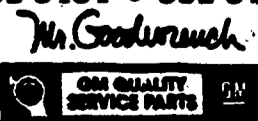
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