

Dimitri House needs larger volunteer pool

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Dimitri House, Corpus Christi Parish's overnight shelter for the homeless, is operating with a minimum number of volunteers, according to administrators.

Shelter Director Lillian Piersante said she hopes to recruit 15 to 30 volunteers in order to avoid overburdening the current complement of unpaid workers.

"What we're trying to do is get so people don't have to (volunteer) more than once a month," Piersante said.

Dimitri House, 102 N. Union St., offers overnight facilities for as many as seven male guests. A drop-in program operating three days each week provides referral services and professional case management for shelter guests and non-guests alike.

A neighboring building run by Dimitri House also provides transitional housing for the homeless.

Two volunteers work at the shelter each evening, house officials noted. One works as a "greeter," welcoming guests to the facility and setting up coffee and snacks for them. The other volunteer acts as a "minister of hospitality," helping the guests find beds and staying up overnight to monitor the shelter.

So far this winter, 80-85 people have signed up to volunteer at Dimitri House, according to Rick Muto, who

coordinates the volunteer program with his wife, Robin. In the past, the number of volunteers has been about 100, he explained.

Muto noted, however, that most of this year's volunteers want to work only on weekends, which causes scheduling headaches Monday through Thursday.

He noted that volunteers willing to work any time are "cherished." But Muto said he tries not to schedule flexible volunteers any more often than he would those with time constraints.

"You have to be careful that you don't overtax people who are willing to (volunteer) overtime," he said.

Volunteers who call Muto or his wife to cancel their commitment at the last minute present another potential scheduling problem, Muto said. Hence, both he and Piersante want to develop a broader pool of volunteers to draw on in such emergency situations.

The character of the guests who have frequented Dimitri House in recent months also may have scared off some volunteers, observers said, noting that the guest population has changed dramatically since the program began in 1981.

Previously, many of the guests had been older men addicted to alcohol and life on the streets. Despite their unorthodox lifestyles, they were generally respectful of the staff.

But as the decade progressed, the



Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer
Lillian Piersante, the director of Dimitri House — Corpus Christi Parish's overnight shelter — hopes to recruit 15 to 30 new volunteers.

guest population became younger and more violent. Many of the guests have been crack and/or cocaine users, observers said, noting that this has contributed to the more violent atmosphere at the shelter.

By the end of the 1990-91 shelter season, some Dimitri House volunteers had grown disenchanted — tired of catering to a population that did not necessarily appreciate the volunteers' efforts.

Former volunteer William Donaldson said the environment at Dimitri House had always contained an element of tension, but that the guests made the 1990-91 shelter season unusually tense.

"You felt more like a police officer rather than a person helping people who needed help," he remarked.

Such complaints from volunteers contributed to the decision in August of this year to end the shelter's nightly

free supper program. Many volunteers began to suspect that some guests did not really need the free meals; others were frustrated by what they saw as the house's short-term approach to such long-term problems as drug addiction.

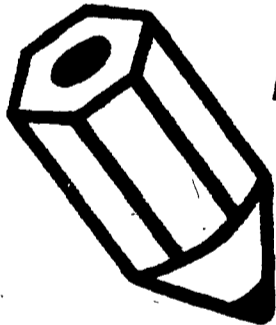
In response, administrators at Dimitri House have expanded their efforts to attack the conditions that keep their guests on the streets, Piersante noted.

This year, for example, three social-service students from Monroe Community College are working as counselors at the shelter as part of their course work. The house also added a third day to its schedule of daytime drop-in hours.

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EDITORS' NOTE: To learn more about volunteering at Dimitri House, call Rick or Robin Muto at 716/461-3595.

Students entering Middle School
(grades 6 & 7) and
High School (grades 9 and above):



Did you select
your Rochester
City School?
You must apply by:

Friday, December 13.

Call the
School Selection Hotline at
262-8400

if you have questions.

Remember, the deadline to turn in
your application to your school is
Friday, December 13th.

Si necesitas esta información en Español, favor de llamar
a la Línea Directa de Selección de Escuelas, 262-8400.

Bishop announces grants

ROCHESTER — Bishop Matthew H. Clark Nov. 22 announced that 15 pro-life organizations in the Rochester diocese will share \$18,000 in grants made through the Respect Life Fund.

The recipients are:

- Birthright of Rochester (\$500) — This emergency counseling and referral service organization provides help for women with problem pregnancies.

- Catholic Family Center (\$1,050) — This agency's priority in the Unmarried Parent Program is to provide support and practical help for clients.

- Melita House (\$3,500) — This housing and supportive program serves pregnant women in need and assists the women in planning for medical care, counseling and educational or job placement.

- Nazareth Academy (\$3,500) — The school has a program for students who have had babies; who have become pregnant while students at Nazareth; and who are sexually active and in need of counseling.

- Puzzle Project (\$900) — This diocesan program provides post-abortion pastoral care in the form of free post-abortion counseling and also reconciliation through the sacrament of penance.

- Birthright of Auburn (\$400) — This organization provides pro-life services to any woman whose pregnancy presents a crisis.

- Birthright of Canandaigua (\$300) — This service organization provides free, confidential counseling to pregnant women.

- Birthright of Ontario (\$475) —

This volunteer service organization provides alternatives to abortion for crisis pregnancy.

- Crisis Pregnancy/Palmyra (\$300) — This organization provides pregnancy testing, abortion-alternative education, foster homes for unwed mothers, maternity and infant supplies and service referrals.

- Faith Haven (\$800) — This inter-denominational maternity home offers residence, support and counseling for young, pregnant women in need.

- Finger Lakes Office of Social Ministry (\$2,000) — To address a need particularly in Seneca County, an outreach Teen Pregnancy Program of this agency provides direct services and education for pregnant, parenting and at-risk teens.

- Birthright of Corning (\$750) — This organization offers a positive alternative to abortion, through counseling, referrals, free pregnancy testing, clothing and other needs.

- Birthright of Ithaca (\$750) — Provides alternatives to abortion for girls and women with problem pregnancies.

- Birthright of Owego (\$750) — This is a free and confidential pro-life pregnancy service organization prepared to help and support any woman facing an unplanned pregnancy.

- Southern Tier Office of Social Ministry (\$2,025) — To address a need particularly in Tioga County, an outreach program was implemented to provide and coordinate support services in the areas of health, education and counseling to pregnant and parenting teens.