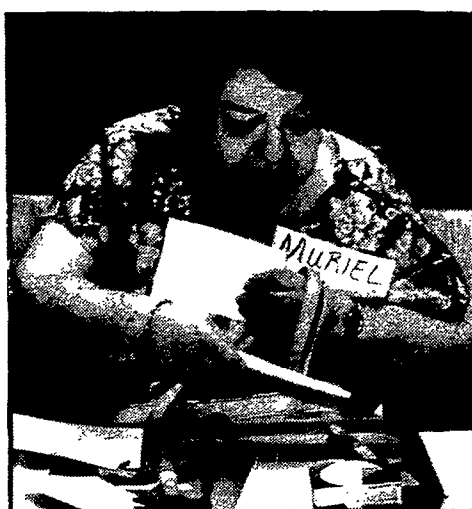




S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

'Price is Right' at St. Ann's

(Top) WOKR-TV Channel 13 anchorman Don Alhart holds up a box of Ritz crackers for contestants to price during the 'The Price is Right' championship game at St. Ann's Home, 1500 Portland Ave., Rochester, on Thursday, Nov. 4. Alhart served as host and game master. Sponsored by the Rochester Association of Homes and Services for the Aging, the tournament featured contestants from 14 different homes for the aged. (Bottom) Muriel Landsman, a resident of the Jewish Home of Rochester, matches prices to tools during the competition.



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Parish program gives the homebound a 'lift'

By Lee Strong
Senior staff writer

EAST BLOOMFIELD — Three years ago, members of the social ministry committee at St. Bridget/St. Joseph Church were looking for ways to better meet the needs of the homebound in their area.

After deciding that one of the best ways to help people was to get them out of their homes, the committee created THEIRS — The Homebound and Elderly in Rural Situations.

Through THEIRS, parishioners volunteer to provide the area's elderly and homebound residents with rides to doctor appointments, hospitals for surgery or treatment, or even just to shop and run errands.

Since its inception, the program has been coordinated by Joan Merkel.

"I thought it was a great idea when they called me up and asked if I would do it," Merkel recalled.

As part of her duties, Merkel links individuals needing transportation with volunteers. Those helped include not only the elderly, but also people who might otherwise be stuck at home due to illness or because they are caring for small children.

"They are often people who are dependent on family, and family is not in the area," Merkel observed, adding, "It's tough out here because we don't have public transportation."

In addition to calls from those needing rides, Merkel also hears from agencies — such as the Office of the Aging — who need clients transported.

Currently, eight drivers work with THEIRS. However, Merkel noted, she

has lost drivers over the years — for a good reason.

"I've asked people to drive," Merkel explained, "and then I never heard from them again because they formed a bond with the person they drove."

Thus they continue to drive that person on their own, and not officially as part of the program, Merkel noted.

Trish Snell, a member of the social ministry committee who served as its chairwoman at the time the program was launched, said she saw the need for such a service while working with an ambulance squad in nearby Bristol.

Snell said that one time when the squad was asked to stop in and check on a woman who lived up in the nearby hills, the crew had to drive many miles off the main roads before reaching the woman's home.

"She just stuck in my mind," Snell said. "You know in rural areas that there are people like that who are hidden."

Although the program has grown, Snell said she'd like to see THEIRS expand even more.

"It's difficult for the people in Bloomfield to come forward when they need something, because there's a lot of pride," she said. As word has spread about the program, however, people have become more comfortable with asking for help.

As for volunteer drivers, Snell said she is not worried.

"Our congregation, although small, no matter what we ask them to do, they just respond," Snell said.

EDITORS' NOTE: To volunteer for THEIRS, or to arrange for transportation, contact Joan Merkel at 716/657-7003.

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