

# EVANSTON REVIEW

NEWS

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## Shelter, Evmark launch 'good neighbor' initiative

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A new initiative sponsored by Evmark and the Center for Public Ministry aims to continue providing resources and a sleeping place for homeless people while preserving a high quality of life for neighboring residents and property owners.

The "Good Neighbor" effort originated with Mayor Lorraine H. Morton, who suggested the get-together in October 1995 after a public meeting in which the Center for Public Ministry's shelter at 607 Lake St. received its annual zoning variance.

At that meeting, neighbors of the shelter, Hilda's Place, complained that people were sleeping in Raymond Park across the street or in stairwells of their buildings, harassing people for money, and urinating and defecating in their parking lots.

"We followed up with each one of them (businesspeople and neighborhood residents), in private. We wanted to take their concerns seriously," said the Rev. David L. Myers, executive director of the Center for Public Ministry.

### Proactive approach

Rather than contending that local residents could not prove that the people had any connection with Hilda's Place, the center adopted a proactive approach, Myers said.

"We said we don't know what their links with the shelter are, but we are as eager as you to find out, because we are neighbors just as you are," he said.

The new effort focuses on keeping the neighborhood clean and orderly through self-

patrol, and by bringing sometimes-opposing groups together for the sake of all the neighbors, whether permanent or transient.

In addition to the Center for Public Ministry, whose funding mainly comes from non-Evanston sources, and Evmark, homeowners and police are included in the initiative.

A Northwestern University study, soon to be released by Professor Dan A. Lewis, examined the local homeless population to learn how it interacts with downtown merchants and homeowners.

In the 1995 fiscal year, Hilda's Place served 1,790 homeless adults. More than 90 percent of these people did not list Evanston as their most immediate past place of residence.

Nearly 75 percent of the residents were men, and about 85 percent were African-American. Their average length of stay at the shelter was 10 days.

Located in the basement of the Lake Street Church, formerly First Baptist Church, Hilda's Place is the only year-round shelter serving the 400-square-mile area north of Chicago and east of the Tri-State Tollway.

As for Evmark, a tax-supported organization that markets downtown, director Terry Jenkins said the partnership fits in with "Evmark's mission to preserve and enhance the environment for downtown."

### 'Shelter Patrol'

One of Evmark's first steps in the initiative was to outfit residents and staffers of Hilda's Place in T-shirts labeled "Shelter Patrol."

Wearing the shirts, shelter residents made rounds, sometimes with downtown foot patrol officer John Mulholland, and cleaned up

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areas near the shelter where neighbors had reported loitering.

Waiter Hallen, building manager at the Grove-Sherman Building near the shelter, attended the October 1995 zoning variance meeting.

"We supported the center and thought it was doing a good job, but we wanted its impact on the surrounding area to be abated or controlled," Hallen said.

"We do see a decrease in the occupancy of our area way, but it still does occur. Right now we're pretty happy, but it still does occur."

Frank Kaminski, acting police chief, said his department has been working with the center, the Evanston Chamber

a program to make sure they police themselves and the neighborhood."

He said that in the self-policing bargain between shelter residents and neighbors, the burden is on the shelter residents to keep the neighborhood clean.

"So far it seems to be working well," Kaminski said.

He concurred with Rev. Myers that it's not always easy to establish a connection between the homeless shelter and people sleeping in parks or other places, and those begging for money.

In the future, he said, the Police Department wants to know how to deal effectively with those different groups of people.

### Difficult to study

The Northwestern study headed by Lewis, an expert on homelessness, was conducted by graduate students. Lewis holds a joint appointment at the university's Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research and the School of Education and Social Policy.

He said homeless people are hard to study because they

like privacy and don't want to be judged. The study identifies "hot spots" where problem behaviors occur.

In addition, the researchers learned more about the eating and sleeping arrangements of homeless people, their support networks, and how they use mental health services and other features of the shelter.

Myers said the study will help the Center for Public Ministry answer questions about the perception of Hilda's Place as a magnet for homeless and transient people.

"We certainly can understand why that perception exists, but we wanted to know if indeed that's true. We weren't saying that it was or wasn't."

Myers said the homeless residents who live temporarily in Hilda's Place are often "radically disconnected" from the community.

During their stay at the shelter, however, they will learn that they are neighbors, too.

"They are both included and they're responsible," Myers said, "and that includes watching out for the good of the neighborhood."

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of Commerce and Evmark since the Mayor's Committee on Panhandling convened more than two years ago.

In December 1994, that committee found that strategies to reduce panhandling by the city, merchants, police and the chamber "had a considerable effect on the panhandlers."

From May to December 1994, out of a group of 36 identified beggars, their panhandling was reduced by 64 percent, according to the committee.

### Market coordinators

Still on the job, set up by the Panhandling Committee, are two market coordinators, Melvin Smith and Lee Winchester.

They walk around the downtown area, observing any problems, while alternately talking to store owners, greeting pedestrians and answering inquiries.

Jenkins said the city's panhandling work is "fairly typical of the way Evanston tries to address things.

"It is sensitive to human needs while trying to create a balance with other citizens."

Speaking of the present Good Neighbor initiative, Kaminski said, "The people staying at the shelter put together