

residents' stay.

"We don't tell people, 'All right, you've been here long enough. You're supposed to be healthy and go out in the world,'" Willis says. "That would be like pulling the rug out from under them. So our policy is that people should stay as long as they need to."

Touch of Class, a second-class clothing store in Eugene, also was created to employ Hawthorn residents and encourage their involvement in the community, Willis says.

"Working there gives many of our residents a real sense of pride and accomplishment," he says. "One woman, for example, used to be very withdrawn and stayed alone in her apartment a lot. She started sewing upstairs in the store and now is downstairs talking to the public and handling sales."

Sponsors, another Eugene organization, specializes in providing services to homeless people who were recently released from correctional institutions.

"When a person leaves a correctional facility, the state will give them a small subsidy, about \$210 to \$240," says Sharon Heger, the program director at Sponsors. "They also get a bus pass and an application for food stamps, but that's all. It doesn't go very far toward meeting even basic needs."

Among the services Sponsors provides is a place where people can get coffee, food and clothing. The organization also provides a telephone for people to use, posts a job board and accepts messages and mail. A counselor is available as well if people need to talk.

"For many people the goal was getting out of prison," Heger says. "Now that they are out, they have to cope with real life and making decisions for

themselves again. We try to help them make this transition as easily as possible."

All the shelter organizations in Eugene stress the need for donations, especially clothes, household items such as dishes, silverware and pots and pans. Linens, towels and other items such as razors, toothbrushes, hats, socks and gloves also are needed, and food donations are always welcome. Cash contributions are encouraged too.

"I think there's a growing awareness of homelessness," Kosture says. "People know friends and neighbors who have been evicted or lost their homes. It makes the problem more personal."

Shaw agrees.

"One of our employees spent four days on the phone recently before she found a place to rent for \$300 to \$400 a month," he says. "And for many people, that's out of their price range. Everyone is suddenly waking up that a lot of people are in tough shape."

Currently, plans are in effect to buy and renovate an 11-unit motel near the Family Shelter House to expand facilities for the homeless in Eugene. The new shelter would be earmarked for the homeless mentally ill and handicapped and free up seven units at Family Shelter House. Input from community officials and shelter providers also has increased the amount of money allotted to the city under FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Act) from 40 to 60 percent this year, Kosture says.

Such steps are positive changes. But it is likely that the demand for emergency housing will continue to be high unless additional funds are found or allocated by the government or private organizations.

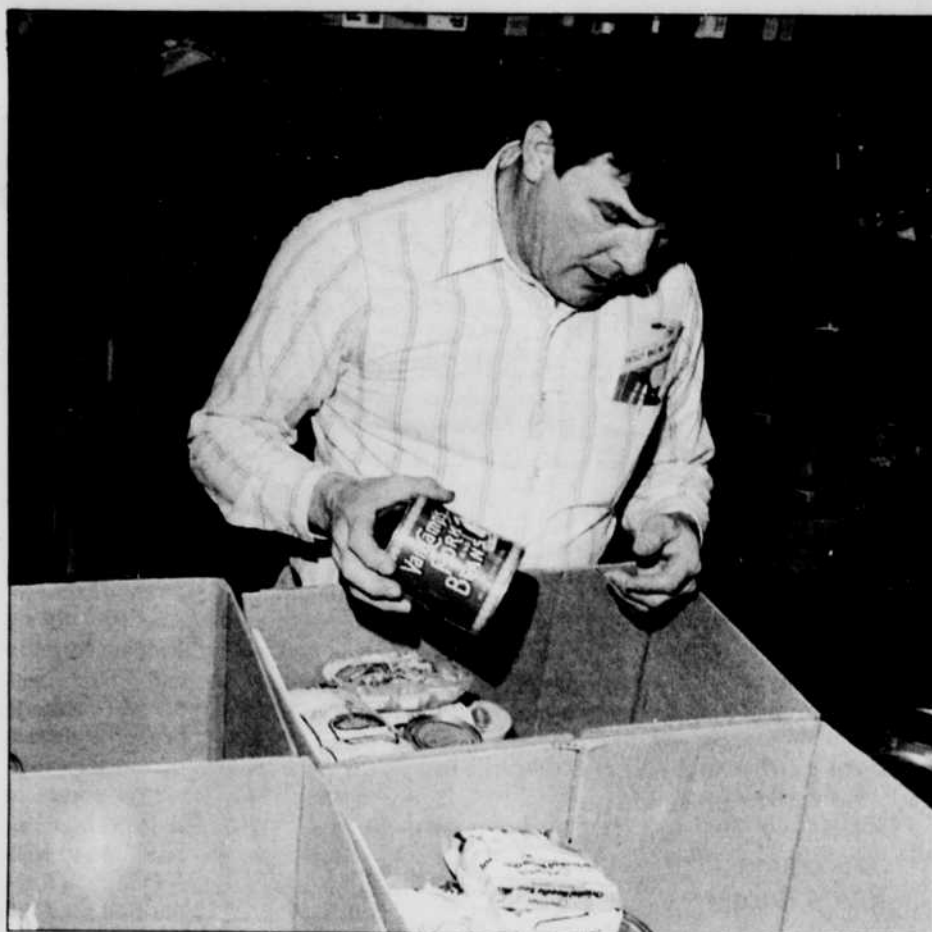


Photo by Sherlyn Bjorkgren

St. Vincent de Paul employee Gil Shaw regularly packs food supplies for homeless families in the Eugene-Springfield area.

One temporary hedge might be the dorms at the University.

"There's a lot of housing that might be utilized at the University," Shaw says. "Of course it could only be used during the summer months. But it might take some of the pressure off the other shelters. Unfortunately, when I asked University officials if they would consider taking people into the dorms, they said 'No way.'"

Shaw says he continues to be frustrated by the lack of funds for the homeless.

"If we had half a million dollars every year for five years we could do it," he says. "We could buy older motels and other facilities, and in time the system could even become self-supporting. Even more important, people would be given some hope, human dignity and self-respect." □

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