

METROPOLITAN

New program helps homeless



Robert Lawrence, his wife Patty and their five-month-old daughter Jane are one of six families living at Urban Plaza at 10 N. Russell St., in housing provided by a new program to help the homeless. (Photo: Richard J. Brown)

by Robert Lothian

Local governments and agencies are joining efforts to provide shelter for Portland's estimated 4,000 homeless, it was announced at a press conference at Urban Plaza last week.

Spearheading the effort are Portland Mayor Bud Clark and Multnomah County Executive Dennis Buchannon. The model program for the homeless combines for the first time the resources of local governments, social services and non-profit organizations.

Families are placed in decent and safe housing away from the Burnside area for up to three months. Social workers help the families achieve self-sufficiency by helping them secure food, clothing, medical help, and jobs.

Urban League president Herb Cawthorne said the program stabilizes living conditions for the families so they can get back on their feet. With a secure home, he said, children can attend school and parents can look for work.

Thanks to the program, Robert Lawrence, his wife Patty and their five month old daughter Jane don't have to live on the street. They are one of six families offered modest apartments free of charge at Urban Plaza, above the Urban League offices at 10 N. Russell St. A total of 19 families, including 32 children, have been helped by the program, a combined effort of the Urban League, the City of Portland, Multnomah County, the Housing Authority of Portland and several non-profit agencies.

"We've watched the faces of these people change," said Cawthorne. "This counts in terms of the community and we believe this is the way to deal with the problem."

Betsy Skloot, director of Multnomah County Human Services, said the program concentrates help for homeless families where it is needed most: in East County, and Northeast and Southeast Portland. An average of

\$525 has been spent for each family in the program, beginning in July, she said. "I think it should be emphasized that this is not a lavish program. The resources are minimal, the results substantial," Skloot said.

Both Skloot and Cawthorne said the program will cut long term social service costs — "pay now... or pay later," in Cawthorne's words. He described money spent on the program "an investment in human potential."

Lawrence said he and his family would be living on the street without the help provided by the Urban League. "Right now, we would probably be down on Burnside trying to find alleys and places to sleep," he said. "Of course, you can't raise a baby on Burnside."

Lawrence came to Portland from New York City three years ago, and he has been unable to find work due to the area's depressed economy. He and his wife married a year later. They slept on the street and collected bottles to make a little money. "We didn't know whether we'd be eating today or tomorrow," he said.

With their shelter needs taken care of, Lawrence said he can put more energy into finding work, following up on the job leads provided by the Urban League.

"A beautiful organization" is how he described the Urban League. "Words cannot describe what they've done for us since we've been here. They opened their doors, their hands, they said, 'Welcome.'"

Building on the success of the model program, a coalition of agencies including Portland Action Committee Together, Neighborhood House, North Community Action Council, Friendly House and the Multnomah County Community Action Agency, have committed to providing a combination of shelter and supportive services to over 200 families.



IFCC Theatre presents **Division Street**: Robin Wollman (left) as "Nadja" and Steve Lee (right) as "Betty." (Photo: Cary Groner)

"Division Street" at IFCC

by Robert Lothian

"Division Street," the season opener at the Interstate Firehouse Cultural Center, is a play for the few die-hards who haven't yet bought into the "Reagan Revolution."

Written in 1980 by Yugoslavian immigrant Steve Tesich, directed by Alana Beth Lipp and produced by Gary O'Brien, "Division Street" resurrects the American dream of the melting-mixing pot, which has been steamrolled over by the new right, and it does it in a funny, farcical way. If Jesse Jackson's rainbow dream for forgotten Americans could be dramatized, than a play like "Division Street" might result.

The play opens with Chris (Steven Clark Pachosa), an ex-radical leader from the 60s, laying low in a dingy apartment on Chicago's Division St. He's trying to forget his radical past and get away from his wife while preparing for a job as an insurance man.

A bad dinner of cabbage rolls in an East European restaurant, however, sets in motion a chain of ridiculous events that upsets Chris' yuppie plans and causes him to rethink his values.

While throwing up in the gutter outside the restaurant, Chris has his picture snapped by a passing news photographer. As in the old days, but this time under different circumstances, his face ends up plastered over the front pages once again.

Soon the restaurant owner, Yovan (Gary Brickner-Schulz), bangs on Chris' door demanding an "apology," an apology, for besmirching his restaurant's reputation, and threatening to kill Chris if he doesn't get it.

Yovan has problems — his wife died, taking all the recipes with her. He tries, but can't make it. "I am so unhappy," he says. "I love America and America no love me."

Chris' Black landlady, Mrs. Bruchinski (Julianne P. Johnson), isn't too happy, either. She's a quadruple minority: Black, Polish, a woman and a senior. Raised by Polish immigrants, she sings "We Shall Overcome" in a Polish accent. The dream of Martin Luther King keeps her going. "Time to march on Washington and make dream come true again," she tells the cynical Chris.

Yovan leaves through the window and shoots a few holes in Chris' T-Bird. Responding to the noise, Betty (Steve Lee) the Black transsexual cop on the beat, recognizes Chris from their radical days together. It turns out that Betty was once the ferocious Black revolutionary "bomber Kellogg," but had a sex change to join the radical wing of NOW, which is where the action was in the 70s. "Sister, I was many things once," Betty tells Mrs. B.

Chris' headache is getting worse when his old radical buddy Roger (Jay Randall) shows up. Roger walks the

streets with a shopping bag and a wig disguised as an old man so women won't make demands on him. His wife left him, and he's paranoid of orgasms.

"The women's movement wrecked the movement with orgasms," the crazed Roger tells Chris. "God, if I had an orgasm I'd give it to them."

Roger tells Chris that the front page picture was to him a cry in the wilderness reminding him of their planned ten-year reunion — "the days of vomit." Roger threatens suicide if Chris won't let him join the new movement he thinks Chris is leading.

Then along comes Roger's ex-wife, a 19-year-old hooker named Nadja (Robin Woolman), who describes herself as "not a prostitute but a slut. I do it as a political statement," she says. Nadja falls for Chris after reading some of his old speeches, which he just happens to keep handy in a box in his living room.

The poor lost ones all look to Chris for some kind of leadership in "the second movement of the great American symphony." They are only eight, and they have their problems, but still it's a start, they say.

The play's resolution might seem overly optimistic in this dark age of the Reagan right. But "Division Street" is a shot in the arm for those wondering, "Who turned the lights out?" With a few laughs, a few tears, like the America that should be, there is something for everyone. "As long as the world of our vision is better than the world we live in," says Chris, "then we will follow our vision."

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The Royal Esquire Club's Community Service Statement by A.D.S.

Volume XI

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