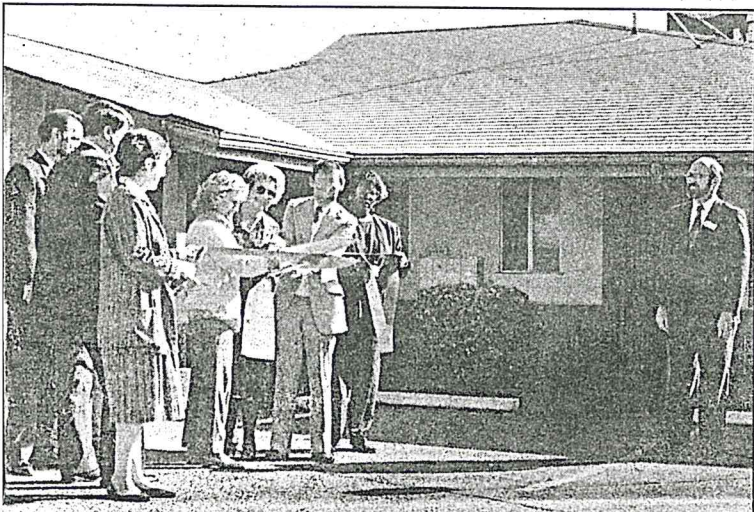


Room AT THE Inn



Chico's first homeless shelter, named the Esplanade House, was dedicated this week. The shelter will house only families, up to 14 at a time.

As homelessness has grown more visible on city streets nationwide, frustration about how to solve the problem has ballooned.

Anger and fear often have overshadowed the public's sympathy. And even though most people agree society should do something to help the needy, they'd prefer it be done somewhere else than in their own back yards.

But four months ago Chico's first homeless shelter quietly opened with hardly a peep of opposition. Since then, The Esplanade House has garnered the support of local service clubs and last Friday was formally dedicated.

Considering the protests that have erupted from time to time about the city's soup kitchen, the Jesus Center, and the opposition that emerged to a proposed homeless shelter in south Chico, the opening of The Esplanade House has been surprisingly inconspicuous.

Those who support and operate the shelter attribute the project's success to the nature of the shelter's mission: It is geared strictly to helping families.

"It's hard to argue against women and children," says Dr. Gary Incaudo, a member of a committee that supported the project.

Of the more than 5 million homeless Americans, 40-70 percent are families. Incaudo says social-service officials estimate as many as 100 families are homeless in Butte County.

Children are the innocent victims. Half of homeless children older than 5 are clinically depressed, and typically children in homeless families suffer from developmental delays and emotional disturbances, Incaudo notes.

The effort to start a homeless shelter in Chico has a long history. It began in 1987 when representatives of the St. Vincent DePaul Society joined together with anonymous donors to spearhead the project. Later they hired a public-relations representative, who directed the effort in conjunction with a group of residents and representatives of the Council of Churches.

The coalition went so far as to find a location and have the plans drawn and approved for a proposed shelter at 19th Street and Park Avenue. Though many Chicanos supported the idea, it was strongly opposed by a number of Park Avenue merchants, who feared it would

compound the problems already caused by the presence of the Jesus Center. Eventually it lost its funding, and the coalition fell apart.

In the meantime, the Community Action Agency in Oroville received a grant to expand its homeless services in the county and was considering opening a shelter in Chico. Another committee then formed, including Incaudo, developer Greg Webb and accountant Alan Lotspeich, and linked with the agency in its effort to open the shelter here.

Using part of a \$325,000 state grant and a \$250,000 grant from the city of Chico, the agency acquired and rehabilitated an old motel at 2505 Esplanade. The shelter can house up to 14 families. Each family has its own living quarters, including kitchen and bathroom.

Although earlier efforts to open a homeless shelter in Chico failed, Incaudo says they still accomplished something, because they built community support for the idea.

The Esplanade House doesn't fit the stereotype of homeless shelters. Only families with children are allowed to stay there, and the rules are strict. No alcohol or drugs are allowed. No visitors are allowed. Everyone must be in by 10 p.m. and up by 8 a.m. And families must save a portion of their income for permanent housing.

"There's a lot of negative things said about shelters," says Lorene Eagleson, Community Action Agency community services coordinator. "We don't want those things said about us."

A few neighboring business owners objected to the proposed shelter in the beginning. Eagleson says she invited them to a meeting before the shelter opened, but few attended. Most waited to see how the shelter operated before showing any support for it.

The shelter is supposed to serve as more than just a temporary roof over families' heads. Its purpose is to be a bridge between homelessness and permanent housing. Families can stay at the shelter for as long as six months.

The shelter accepts only families who are committed to solving their problems, Eagleson says. But she acknowledges that gauging whether potential clients are committed to changing their lives is difficult. Since the shelter opened in July, the staff has had to ask one family to leave. But others have gone on to find permanent housing, she says.

Since it opened, The Esplanade House has gained support among a variety of community groups. Phi Upsilon Omicron, the honor society for the Chico State University Human Resources Development Department, has adopted the shelter as its project of the year. Interior-design majors helped decorate the rooms, and nutrition and child care majors have agreed to work with shelter residents.

Other groups also have donated money and time, including the Mormon Church, the Council of Churches, the Noon Exchange Club, the Breakfast Lions Club and the Chico Rotary Club.

Chico's First Homeless Shelter Opens

By Barbara Marquand

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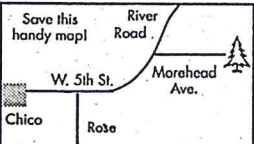
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OLDIES 101 FOOTBALL CONTEST

Contest Games for week of December 1, 1991

Fill in the box next to the team you pick to win.

Entries must be deposited by 11:00pm each Saturday.

- | | | | | | |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Tampa | at | <input type="checkbox"/> Miami | Monday Night Game | | |
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