

County's sightless have good friends at resource center

By CAROLYN
HEEBNER-SWIFT

How can a newly-blind person find a can of peas in the cupboard?

Where do the visually disabled turn when they want a good book, a game of Bingo with friends or the simple companionship of another who shares and understands the frustrations of the sightless world?

Until last September, nearly 5,000 blind residents of Santa Cruz County hunted for the answer to these questions alone. And many were the elderly, newly blind who are the least able to take up the search.

Now there is help. The Doran Resource Center for the Blind was created last fall to focus on the problems of the county's sightless population.

According to Mrs. Ray Westman, president of the Doran Center Board of Directors, the goal of this project is to provide social services such as counseling, transcription of materials and a transportation network; educational services to include adaptive skills for daily living; and recreational activities. In addition, the center has set up a low vision clinic where medical staff and volunteer specialists work with the visually disabled on a referral basis.

The idea for the project was originally begun several years ago by Dave Doran, who has a son who is blind. Doran found it difficult to get the things his son needed — even such simple items as a tip for his cane. So when he returned to college for work on his degree, it was suggested that Doran do thesis work on the blind and resources available in the local area.

Doran's studies led to the formation of a group of teachers, students and interested community members that included therapists and rehabilitation workers. The organization became official this year when it established by-laws and obtained its tax-exempt status.

"The skills were here, but in the past there has been no coordination," Mrs. Westman said, "We came together either because of our vocations or a personal interest in the blind."

The board president is an example of the center's pool of talent. She had worked as a volunteer for the New York headquarters of Recording for the Blind, and then returned to California to start another unit of this national organization. She was employed a total of more than a dozen years, and since her retirement is

still an active board member.

"When I came to Santa Cruz several years ago, I was looking for something to continue my interest in working with the blind," she said, "It was through Cabrillo College that I learned about the people trying to start the Doran Center."

The board's vice-president, Chuck Adams, is active with the Library of Congress Talking Book Program. Doran, who is treasurer, is one of several parents active with the organization. Other volunteers and board members are themselves blind, and they give suggestions for center programs based on their own experiences and needs as sightless county residents.

The Doran Resource Center is taking a multi-faceted approach in the services it will provide. A chief emphasis will be the low vision clinic that is scheduled to open in late February or March.

"The clinic will take over when the optometrist or ophthalmologist says he can do no more for the patient," said Mrs. Westman, "Particularly for people who are aging. As their eyes grow older these people need

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Coping with the darkness

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help, but sometimes all the doctor can do is strengthen their glasses and tell them to get a brighter light."

Clinic staff will evaluate clients and show them how to use different kinds of aides, such as a magnifying glass with a light for easier reading. Referrals will also receive medical advice for specific problems.

A financial system for clinic management is being prepared, and fees will be involved. However, Medi-Cal patients will be accepted and other financial help will be available.

Soquel Lions Club is one example of the community organizations that have already given support. It has pledged a donation of \$1,000 per year for the clinic as part of its blindness prevention program. Mrs. Westman said other Lions Clubs in the county have also shown an interest in the center project.

The clinic will open at the County Health Services Agency on Emeline St., Santa Cruz. The nearest facility of its kind is presently in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Although the Doran Resource Center for the Blind opened its doors five-months ago in quarters of the Easter Seal Society in Santa Cruz, the space was only temporary and the center is now searching for a permanent home.

"The Easter Seal Society told us they needed the space we were occupying, so we had to leave," Mrs. Westman explained. "Meanwhile, the Fidelity Savings in Capitola has been very kind to allow us to use their community room, where we have been able to continue our bridge lessons and discussion groups. But there is no kitchen, and so we have not been able to go on with our cooking instruction which has been most popular."

Ideally, the president said, the center hopes to find a home that has kitchen space, ample meeting room and a place where things can be stored.

"One of the first goals we have is to provide aids quickly for people who need them," she added. "Usually they have to wait weeks and weeks, and we'd like to be able to have these on hand. Since we can't be constantly moving these aids from place to place, we need storage space in permanent quarters."

There is no exact deadline for finding a new home, but the Doran Center has been looking for more than a month and needs to find another building soon. Mrs. Westman said an old home or even a "fixer-upper" will do, since two contractors are standing by as volunteers willing to do whatever needs to be done in repairs.

The Doran Center hopes to find space large enough to conduct classes in art, bridge and exercise, for example. Individual and group instruction will be offered in adaptive daily living skills such as cooking, sewing, homemaking, record keeping and grooming. A credentialed instructor will provide travel training. Classes will also be given in Braille reading, writing and typing. Crafts will be designed to increase the manual and mental

sensitivity of blind persons.

"At the moment, we have very little money," Mrs. Westman said, "But if we find a reasonable place with ample parking, the directors can go out and get grants and raise the necessary funding."

The Doran Center has already received encouragement from the community. In addition to the donations of the Lions Club, Teleprompter promised a percentage of subscriptions from its home box office sale, providing funding to purchase equipment for the low vision clinic. Mid county Soroptimists donated a recorder and some tapes. And Mrs. Westman credits Cabrillo College as a major contributor through its educational programs.

"Cabrillo College has been a moving force since the inception of this project," she said, "Its special services division has given incalculable help, and continues to be a great supporter."

Cabrillo has a mobility trainer who now works as a volunteer for the Doran Center. This is a service provided for the more newly blind. The trainer visits the home and teaches simple skills — such as how to move about in a familiar environment without the benefit of sight.

"The mobility trainer shows the blind person the tricks of how to get along in the sighted world," said Mrs. Westman, "Ways to fix up the kitchen, for example. Or how to find out what's in the can when you bring home the groceries, how to cut vegetables without slicing your finger, or how to set the temperature on your oven."

Cabrillo College also works closely with the Doran Resource Center in planning counseling services. Eventually, the center will provide adjustment counseling and guidance for those who suffer sight loss. A transcription service will make possible the conversion of printed materials, and the center plans to create a lending library for information of topical or local interest — items difficult for blind persons to find on their own.

"We haven't implemented too much counseling yet," the president added, "But we do have discussion sessions. Participants get together, talk about their problems and how they solved or plan to solve them. It is a support group activity and a chance to do some brainstorming."

Those most involved with the center at present are elders, although the directors plan activities for all ages. One board member hopes to start a sports program, for example.

Recreational activities include games and field trips. Mrs. Westman said one of the most successful so far was a visit to see the butterflies at Natural Bridges State Park.

"The park rangers seemed to know what to do," she added, "They took us on a great tour."

Social gatherings and lectures are also sponsored by the Doran Center. One recent program was a talk given two weeks ago by a detective from Monterey who spoke about how the blind can protect themselves.

While the center is just beginning, it is struggling with the search for a new home and the need for finances. But there is another, even greater challenge — finding the blind.

"It is very difficult to locate the blind population," she said, "Their names are not given out, and we have to find them through the publicity about our program or by word of mouth. That is our one worry, that we must grow and get the word out about our existence. Otherwise, we will not be as useful as we want to become."

Funding for supplies and materials is another need.

"We would like to buy cassette tapes, various aids for mobility and games adapted for the blind," Mrs. Westman explained, "If people are interested in making donations, what we need most is money."

Additional information about the Doran Resource Center for the Blind may be obtained from the officers of board of directors: Mrs. Westman, 476-3616; Chuck Adams, vice-president, 426-7894; Mary Dunham, secretary, 684-0875; and Dave Doran, 426-8775.

Directors include Jackie Allen, Suzanne Ament, Dr. Larry Bechtel, Dr. Jack Christerson, Ruth Davidson, Lori Ferris, Trish Foley, Maxine Freeman, Bernice Hendryx, Dennis Holter, Dr. Robert Loggins, Robert Ludlow, Toni Miras, Fay Moreland, Carin Mudgett, Msgr. J. Munier, Francine Tabasa, Ray Tfebbien, Sherman Unell, Norma Ward and Dr. B. Zwerling.

Robbery suspects sought

Capitola police are looking for a man and woman who robbed a shoe store Monday morning.

Chief Supervising Officer Tom Hanna said a male Mexican in his mid-20s walked into the Payless shoe store, 1820 41st Ave., at 11:10 Monday. He waited until a clerk was alone in the store, pulled a handgun and demanded money. He walked out of the store with \$96.

Witnesses gave police a description of a van used in the getaway, and Monterey County Sheriff's deputies found a similar vehicle Tuesday in King City, Hanna said.

Injured bus rider files suit

A \$1 Million lawsuit has been filed against the Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District by a woman injured last July as she was boarding a bus.

The suit, filed in Santa Cruz Superior Court Thursday, also names the county and city of Santa Cruz as co-defendants.

Brenda Baynard, of Aptos, has claimed in her suit that the transit district and its agents (the county and city) were negligent in maintenance and operation of buses, which resulted in serious injury to her as she was boarding a bus in front of Cabrillo College July 2.