

Now There's Help for the Victim

By MARGARET KOCH
Sentinel Staff Writer

An elderly woman, in frail health, one day made her way slowly down a Santa Cruz side street, her handbag on her arm.

It was a warm fall afternoon, a good day to be out, shortly after the first of the month. Her purse contained money she needed in order to pay her rent and buy food for the month. She was on her way to get a medical prescription refilled.

Suddenly two young hoodlums came up behind the woman, hit her over the head with a club, knocked her to the sidewalk, grabbed her purse and fled. The whole thing happened almost faster than these words can be read.

Bewildered, bruised and

in shock with a broken arm and a concussion, the woman lay helpless on the walk until a neighborhood resident happened to look out and see her. The police and an ambulance were called. The woman couldn't even give a description; it had all happened so fast.

The fact that this elderly woman was attacked with a weapon and suffered a skull fracture and broken arm as a result of violence, makes her a candidate for a new aid program of the County of Santa Cruz.

It is Victim Services, which is administered by the Santa Cruz county Probation department under the direction of James W. Solomon, chief probation officer.

The new program's goals are: to reduce the impact of

violent crime on the victim and those affected relatives and friends, and to hasten recovery from physical injury, emotional difficulties and financial loss.

The new program provides this support for the victim through ensuing criminal and civil court processes.

Perhaps even more importantly, the new program mobilizes services which are available, and calls public attention to the victim.

Victims also can be the family survivors of a murdered person who are left with material and psychological problems.

"In 1973 there were approximately 4000 reorted felonies in Santa Cruz County and for each one there can be as many as 10 victims," Solomon points out.

Solomon actually wrote this Victims program about six years ago: "We've been trying to get state funding and finally got it. There are only about six counties in the state that have this Victims program."

However, state funding does not automatically guarantee its operation as a success.

"The only way this program can possibly work is through volunteers," he explains. "We need senior citizen volunteers and community volunteers."

The volunteers will be trained to assist and aid the Probation department's personnel who will include a senior deputy probation officer and a probation trainee.

The Probation department's coordinator, Iula Anderson, will work with them to develop quality volunteers from the community and to select student interns from the area's universities.

The elderly woman victim of assault and robbery who was left penniless and physically injured by the street attackers, thus discovered that she was entitled to the support of the entire Santa Cruz County criminal justice system and Probation department.

"A group of citizen-victims, too long neglected, now has support and services," Solomon says.

The incidence of violent and serious crime continues

to increase, he points out. In the period from 1968 through 1973 statewide, the seven major crimes increased 33.9 per cent. (These are the most recent statistics available.)

In Santa Cruz county in 1973, 4,810 felony crimes were reported. Of these, 27 were wilful homicides, 93 robberies, 416 assaults, 65 forcible rapes, 2,930 burglaries, 680 grand thefts and 599 auto thefts.

"These crimes, of course, result in a huge reservoir of victims who have been receiving less and less attention as the system becomes more complex," Solomon states. "This Victims program will perform a much needed service."

A six-step approach to the service is planned by the Probation department. It will include: locating victims, contacting victims, helping victims determine individual needs, referring victims to appropriate resources, evaluating victims' progress and carrying through with a follow-up process.

Victims of serious crimes who suffer either physical injury or serious property loss will receive the greatest attention from the program, logically.

"In the matter of seconds the life of a victim of violent crime is irrevocably changed — or ended —," Solomon points out, "while the offender, if identified and apprehended, draws the

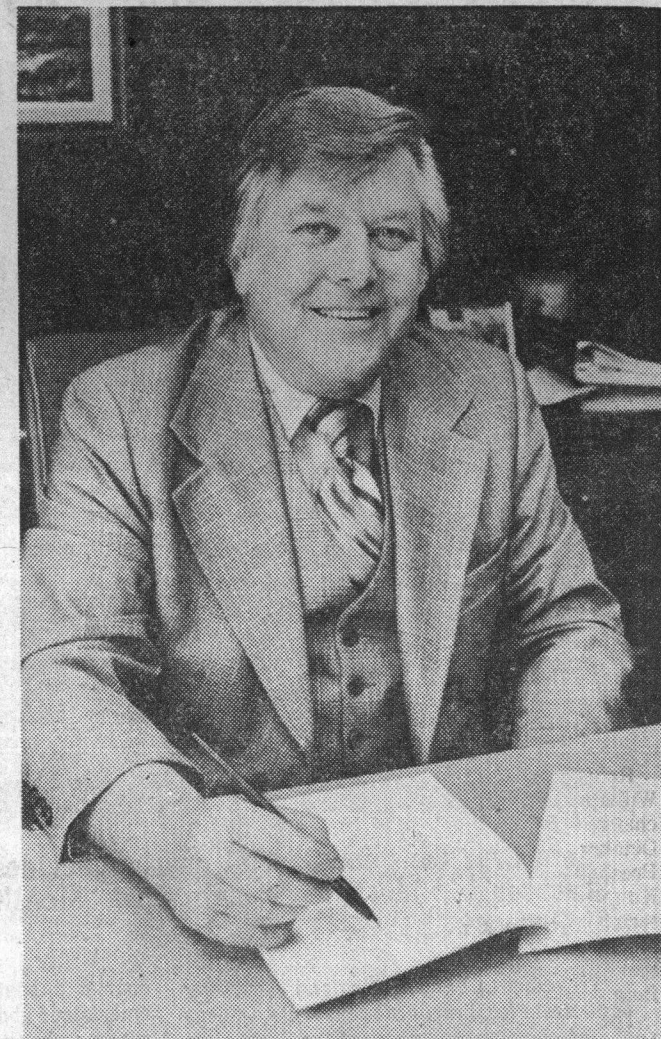
attention of a vast array of agencies. The victim remains alone, often ignored. It is this inequity that the Victim services program in Santa Cruz county hopes to alter."

The elderly woman who was seriously injured and robbed would be contacted, helped with medical and financial needs by appropriate government departments and her case would be supervised by the Probation department which also would carry out the follow-up.

Volunteer workers who are needed for this program will take special training before they are assigned to any direct services.

The volunteer must: possess a complete understanding of the criminal justice system and the rules and laws applying to the processing of a criminal case; he must possess a working knowledge of basic social casework practices; he (or she) must have an awareness of public and private resources available, and must have the personal qualities that enable the worker to be an effective aid to the victims of violence while maintaining a high degree of professionalism.

"Much is demanded of volunteers in Victim services," notes the coordinator, Iula Anderson, "the rewards are intangible and the work is difficult. Qualified persons are very special and very few."



Chief Probation Officer James Solomon



Iula Anderson, Volunteer Coordinator

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