

Organize Spouse Assault Task Force

A spouse assault task force to address the problems of domestic violence in the twin cities area has been organized at the St. Joseph-Benton Harbor YWCA.

According to Mrs. Frank W. (Sally) Howard, task force chairman and member of the YWCA board of directors, "The purpose of the task force is to raise the consciousness of the community, to recognize the incidence of spouse assault, and to

aid battered spouses."

Spouse assault is defined as any assault and battery, felonious assault, or assault with intent to do bodily harm between persons in any couple relationship.

According to Sally Meach, administrative assistant to Berrien County Prosecutor John Smietanka, 46 per cent of the 240 assault and battery cases filed with the prosecutor's office in 1976 involved spouse assault.

Local agency officials estimate that the number of known spouse assault cases is approximately five to seven per cent of the actual incidence, according to Meach. She adds that national statistics indicate spouse assault, and specifically wife beating, is the number one hidden crime in the United States.

Maureen Cole Pedersen, YWCA executive director, says "The spouse assault task force

was formed as a result of the YWCA's commitment to effectively impact on the problems of battered women in the community."

Documenting the extent of spouse assault and educating the community have been established as the major focuses of the task force during the coming months.

The task force is planning a telephone counseling and referral service where battered spouses can seek help anonymously and in strict confidentiality.

Five task force members attended hearings of the Michigan Women's Commission on

domestic violence and the physical abuse of women Oct. 5 in Grand Rapids, to begin to identify what is known about the problem and what is needed by the victims of this kind of assault. Hearing testimony included statements from agencies and organizations which have dealt in this area and personal testimony from victims of physical abuse.

Members of the task force, in addition to interested community volunteers and other lay people, are the YWCA, the Berrien county prosecutor's office, Riverwood Community Mental Health Center, the Berrien county department of social services, the Lake

Michigan college Women's Center, the Samaritan Center, the Berrien County Council of Churches, Child and Family Services of Michigan, and radio stations WHFB and WSJM.

Mrs. Howard says individual citizens, agencies and organizations are invited to join the spouse assault task force so that "a total community effort may be used to alleviate the problems of battered spouses."

Anyone wishing to join the task force or desiring further information may contact the YWCA in St. Joseph.

The YWCA is a participating member of Blossomland United Way.

Antique Show

EDITOR'S MAILBAG

BERRIEN HEART UNIT SAYS THANKS

Editor,

On behalf of the Berrien County Heart Unit, I want to thank you for your effort and space provided for the seminars and special events of the Heart Association.

Your cooperation has been greatly appreciated and enabled us to have another successful year. Thank you again from the heart!

Martha Wilder
Berrien County Heart
1789 Brown School Rd.
St. Joseph.

ERA IS GOOD FOR AMERICA

Editor,

The focus of the Equal Rights Amendment is upon equality of rights under the law and not upon equality of persons nor upon the equality of men and women. For if it is legal rights that are to be afforded equally and not different persons who are to be made exceptionally equal in the law, the opposition to

the Amendment founded in "la difference" is nonresponsive. unless "la iffERENCE" explains why rights should not be afforded equally.

Along this same line of reasoning, one hears the argument that the ERA threatens the American family, which can only be true if the American family is dependent upon the inequality of rights afforded by law to men and women. The ERA is not a vast plan to castrate men, dump on housewives, steal babies to fill government daycare centers, draft teenage girls, create unisex public toilets or make everyone wear the same kind of underwear.

Equally erroneous is the "magic wand equality" theory which focuses upon equality as a status conferrable by law upon persons rather than as a positive value in the distribution and exercise of rights. By this theory, a hypothetical judge would be free to say "Okay, you're equal now, so go out and get a job, and take over the world,

since it's yours now, too."

What then does ratification of the ERA mean? A constitutional amendment does nothing more or less than provide a framework on which to hang judicial interpretations of other rules, laws, and statutes. As an amendment to the Constitution, the ERA places the principle that "equality of rights under law shall not be denied or abridged ... on account of sex" in the highest and most powerful form available in our system of laws, which in the company of other principles, in theory, will guide or control the entire operation of law in the U.S. The courts are basic to the achievement of a legal system that doesn't deny or abridge rights on account of sex. Legislatures can and hopefully will, act to implement the fullest and soundest theory of the ERA in the living law, but only judges can breathe the spirit of equality into the law in the daily operation of our courts.

There should be no time to insure "equality" under the law." Write your legislator today asking them to support extension of the time limit for ERA ratification. ERA is good for people, ERA is good for America.

Do You REMEMBER?

— 10 Years Ago —

Ralph W. Hetherington, 47,
of 1179 Agard avenue, Benton

Two talented young pianists
represented Berrien county in
the state music contest in De.

Margaret Gast Howard
St. Joseph

YWCA Seminar

Planned Feb. 10

St. Joseph-Benton Harbor YWCA will sponsor a Board-Staff Training Seminar Saturday, Feb. 10, from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. at the YWCA, St. Joseph.

All YWCA board and staff members of the Kalamazoo, Grand Rapids, twin city and South Bend YWCAs are eligible to attend.

The seminar will be conducted by Phyllis L. Wyrick, National YWCA staff member

and midstates regional field consultant, and Martha Vincent, a member of Detroit Metropolitan YWCA board of directors.

The training will focus on board and staff responsibilities and the relationship between board and staff members within the structure of the YWCA, according to Margaret Howard, public relations director of the local YWCA.

Margaret Gast voted in as new trustee

By **LOUISE WREGG**

HP Staff Writer

BENTON HARBOR — By a 5-1 vote, Margaret Gast of Benton Township was named the new Benton Harbor school board trustee at a special meeting Tuesday.

Gast said she grew up in St. Joseph and moved to Minnesota for 35 years before returning to the area four years ago.



GAST

“I was well aware of the issues going on with the Benton Harbor schools, which has been of great concern to me, even living far away in Minnesota,” she said after the meeting. “I do believe that the school system is the heart of any community and decided to throw my hat in the ring and see if I could help out in my capacity as a retired person who has the time to put in to helping the Benton Harbor schools get back to a place ... that I remember in the 1960s.”

She said she’s an attorney and worked as the associate director of a housing agency in St. Paul, Minn., which sought to stabilize neighborhoods where at least 40 percent of the housing is owner-occupied.