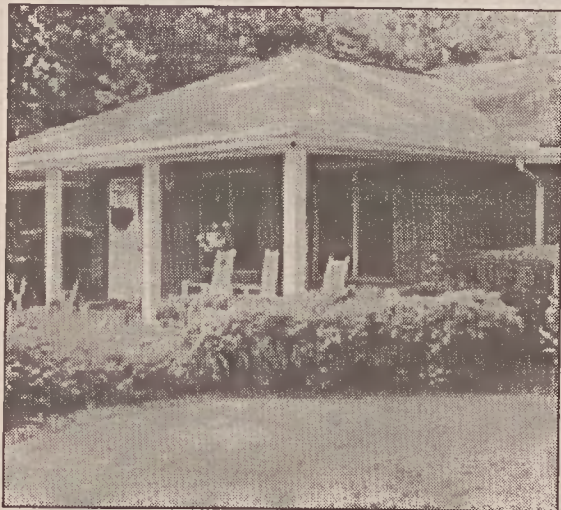


April AIDS walk to benefit House of Mercy

Belmont's AIDS care facility can house 12 individuals

House of Mercy, a nonprofit residential facility serving persons living with advanced AIDS, is preparing for its 11th Annual Walk for AIDS fundraiser, set for April 4 at 2 p.m.



House of Mercy is a not-for-profit residential care facility for people living with AIDS.

This three-mile jaunt through historic downtown Belmont is designed to raise awareness of the HIV/AIDS problem in the Metrolina region and raise funds to maintain the operating costs of House of Mercy, located in Belmont, NC.

Walkers of all ages are invited to take part in this event by collecting sponsor money to support their three-mile walk. Individuals from churches, civic groups, schools and other community organizations form teams to walk together. A celebration will follow the walk on the grounds of the residence. All volunteers and participants are invited to the reception afterwards to enjoy food, drinks and live bluegrass music by The South Fork Boys. Prizes will be awarded for the top fundraisers and best banner.

Persons who cannot participate in the Walk for AIDS are encouraged to sponsor a walker or contact House of Mercy at 704-825-3000 to find out more information about volunteering directly with clients. Volunteers can take residents to movies, shopping, walks to the parks and more.

House of Mercy was founded in 1991 by the Sisters of Mercy in Belmont to provide

housing and compassionate 24-hour care for persons living with advanced AIDS throughout the state. Approximately 200 men and women have made their home at House of Mercy. Physical, psychological and spiritual support is provided to residents who are admitted without concern for race, religion or sexual orientation. House of Mercy is the only facility of its type in the region and is in its 12th year of operation.

According to statistics, states in the south, with a third of the United States population, account for approximately 46 percent of all HIV/AIDS cases. New cases of HIV disease, totaling 1,692, were reported to the N.C. Division of Public Health in 2002. This represents an increase of 16 percent over 2001. African-Americans and Hispanics accounted for 70 percent of new AIDS cases in 2002. The N.C. Division of Health & Human Services estimates at least 21,000 North Carolinians are living with HIV/AIDS with one-quarter to one-third of this number unaware of their status.

To register or to learn more about how to participate in this annual event, call Marjorie Storch at House of Mercy, 704-825-4711.

info: www.thehouseofmercy.org

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For contestant information or pageant information, contact:

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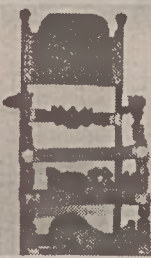
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