

Spectre Of Hunger Haunts County

By Audrey C. Ledato
Post Staff Writer

While church groups and social service agencies struggle to feed the poor not only at Christmas but throughout the year, the spectre of hunger remains. They may not have bloated bellies like the starving in Africa, but people are hungry here in Mecklenburg County.

Who are the hungry and where do they come from?

"Some are street people, some are people from the neighborhood whose funds don't stretch far enough, and others are transients," says Olen McLeod, supply coordinator for St. Peter's soup kitchen of that program's "customers."

The soup kitchen has a nucleus of "regulars," but new faces show in the crowd. They are of all ages. "We do see children," notes McLeod, "sometimes, babes in arms. I try to keep baby food on the shelf in case."

Some of the transients are "chasing a rainbow," she says, coming to, or through, Charlotte looking for work.

St. Peter's has been serving about 200 a day recently, up from the 145-150 per day average.

Scottie Lindsay, whose cumbersome title is "Hunger Action Enabler," works for the Mecklenburg and Catawba Presbyteries and is on the board of Loaves and Fishes, an ecumenical group which provides emergency food supplies to people who have been referred by other agencies.

Lindsay says that a lot of people served by Loaves and Fishes are those who find that their food stamps can't get them through the month, or their income doesn't stretch enough to cover their living expenses. Marty Furr, Loaves and Fishes director, adds, "Most of our clients are not repeaters. They are one-time emergency clients. We see a lot of young single mothers who don't know how to manage." This group, she adds, has been increasing.



Scottie Lindsay
....."Hunger Action Enabler"

ing as the pregnancy rate increases.

A significant number simply can't make their incomes stretch enough to meet their basic needs. "They have to make a decision about whether to pay rent or heat, or to eat. We're seeing a lot more of the 'working poor,'" Furr reports.

The Charlotte Area Fund, a community action agency which helps Mecklenburg low income and disadvantaged residents through self-help programs, has set up "consumer buying clubs" for those who have completed the agency's money management course, which covers such topics as budgeting, saving money, and establishing credit. The emphasis is on establishing priorities and stretching money.

These consumer buying clubs can, through the Area Fund, buy food at 10 cents a pound from the Metroline Food Bank, of which Harris-Teeter Supermarkets is a prime supporter. According to the program's income management coordinator, Mary Stalon, some participants report saving as much as

\$25-\$50 each week.

About one-third of the program's clients, estimates Stalon, are working, but there is no one face to the hungry. "The problems vary," she remarks. "An average of 50-60 people a week call for emergency food from our food closet." Some of these are "repeaters," she says, but most are new. Circumstances vary, but it may be that the head of the household has lost a job; in other instances, it's the end of the month and food stamps have run out.

Charlotte Area Fund director Kirk Grosch adds that "a cross section of people are constantly hungry. They may eat one meal a day."

When one looks at the official poverty levels, it's easy to see how people who work and who are not "officially" poor can still be hungry. An individual, for instance, is considered to be in poverty if he or she earns \$5,250 or less per year. The poverty level for a household of three is \$3,850; for four, \$10,600.

A single person earning minimum wage (\$3.35), working 40 hours a week and 52 weeks a year, could expect to gross \$8,968. This breaks down to \$134 per week before taxes. With one exemption, federal and state taxes come to about \$12.50 and FICA (Social Security) takes out another \$9.45, leaving \$110. Although this person, by income level, would not be an official poverty statistic, it would nonetheless be difficult to maintain independent living on this amount of money in today's society.

Approximately 10 percent of Mecklenburg County is listed in poverty, according to Census figures. Many others are marginally poor.

"The need is very great," comments St. Peter's McLeod. Nevertheless, some hunger workers have hope. "I really believe people of good will working together can solve this," assures Lindsay. "I don't think hunger is an unsolvable problem."

35 New Troopers Report For Assignments

Special To The Post
Raleigh - The 77th State Highway Patrol Basic School graduated 35 troopers in ceremonies held Thursday, December 12, at the Highway Patrol Training Center.

Ralph M. Ford of Matthews was a member of the graduating class and has been assigned to Winston-Salem, E-IV.

Joseph W. Dean, secretary of the N.C. Department of Crime Control and Public Safety, delivered the commencement address. Dean said, "We are very proud of these graduates. They follow in the footsteps of the professional spirit of service to North Carolinians that established in 1929 when the Patrol was established."

Secretary Dean recalled the

words of the late Superior Court Judge Henry Grady who administered the oath to the first patrolmen in 1929. Dean said, "Being an officer of the North Carolina State Highway Patrol is a serious undertaking, and it will call forth every ounce of courage and every particle of patience subject to your command. As you report to your duty stations, you are North Carolina's finest."

Since the first group of North Carolina's finest took to the roads on motorcycles and Ford coupes, the patrol's strength has grown to more than 1,100. With more cars on the roads and more miles to cover, Secretary Dean again called for an increase in troopers. Dean said, "Additional manpower is needed to

improve traffic law enforcement, protect our citizens, and provide the best possible service to the motoring public."

The troopers took 853 hours of instruction in more than 93 courses during their 18-week school. Courses included instruction in human relations, criminal and constitutional law, firearms training, precision driving and other law enforcement subjects.

The new troopers will report to their duty stations on December 18.

They will continue their education through on-the-job training and in-service schools during their careers with the State Highway Patrol.



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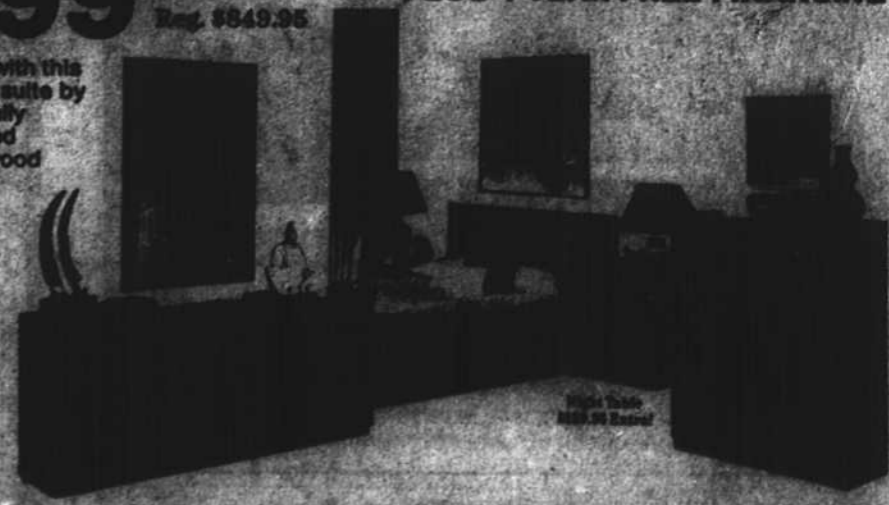


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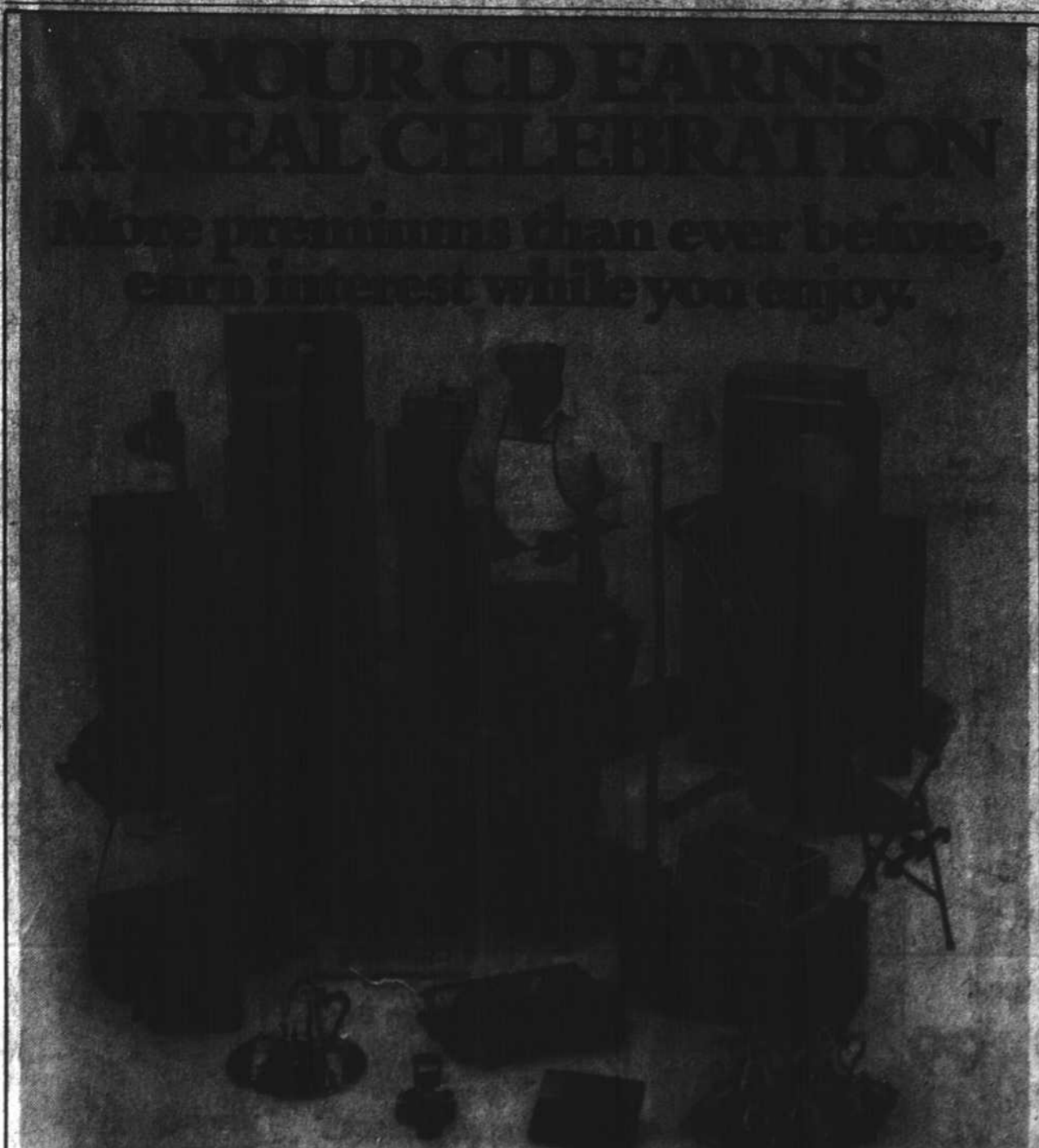
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