

Best Choice Center gets 2 New Year surprises

By PATRICIA SMITH-DEERING
Community News Editor

Monday marked the first day of operation for the Best Choice Center in a facility that its director, Dorothy Graham-Wheeler, has wanted since early in 1990. An elated staff moved the program's furnishings and equipment from the old location at 14th Street to the building that previously housed St. Peter's Apostolic Church World Outreach Center at 11th Street and Highland Ave.

And at the same time she received the go-ahead to occupy the new quarters, Graham-Wheeler was surprised with a \$25,000 check for the center from her brother and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Carter. The gift is the largest donation from an individual that the center has ever received.

Overwhelmed with the double good fortune, Graham-Wheeler is pleased to have some relief from the problems that plagued the city's only neighborhood community-based drug intervention and prevention program for most of last year. The building where the center was previously housed has been a source of concern for the staff almost from the start when the program began in 1988. Beset by leaks and flooding when it rained, the center was forced to close temporarily in November because the floor was under water. The center was also facing the threat of having to move anyway in light of road improvements on 14th Street that might possibly involve the center's location and neighboring buildings.

Graham-Wheeler began looking at other locations that would provide a better environment for the children that the center served and offer more space to expand the program when she became the center's director nine months ago, she said. "Young kids who live in the city should have a better environment (at the center) than that in which they live. The center should represent the programs offered," she said in a recent interview.

The 6,000-square-foot facility will allow the center to add more programs and can accommodate from 200-300 students, a significant increase from the approximately 25-30 served at the 14th Street location. In describing her search for a new location, Graham-Wheeler credits the teamwork of people like East Ward Alderman Virginia Newell, James Mack, and Bishop J. C. Hash, pastor of St. Peter's. "I had no single-handed task," she said and added that she knew the Outreach Center was destined to be Best Choice's new home. She said, "I claimed that building in the name of Jesus...Bishop Hash shared my vision, too."

According to the terms of the contract to purchase the building, the center must have \$50,000 by January 31 in order to remain in the facility. In December 1990, Graham-Wheeler and the co-chairs of the Best Choice Center's Campaign Fund, Ernie Pitt and Eldridge Hanes, requested that the Board of Aldermen's finance committee recommend approval of their request for \$50,000 toward the acquisition and renovation of another facility to house the center. She moved into the Highland Avenue location contingent on getting

the funds from the city, Graham-Wheeler said, as well as additional funds from other sources. The board is scheduled to meet Monday, Jan. 14, to review the center's request. Once the initial funds required in the purchase agreement have been obtained, the center has until 1992 to complete the acquisition, she said.

The surprise donation from Mr. and Mrs. Carter will go a long way toward assisting the center in its financial dilemma. "I was elated by his gift, so pleasantly surprised," an excited Graham-Wheeler said of her brother and sister-in-law's check. She said the amount was equal to a foundation grant and hopes that her family's generosity will spark others in the community to support the center. "Winston-Salem has a lot of prosperous people, especially black people," she said. "They may not have that much (\$25,000) to give, but \$500 or \$1,000 can do a lot," she added.

Contacted in Raleigh where the Winston-Salem native now makes his home, Carter said that his gift was sparked by his own childhood in Winston-Salem. "Someone has to reach back...I really wanted to do something. I had this thing in the back of my mind all my life to do something to help some kids do something with their lives." He said that he hopes his gift will help the center reach its potential in developing programs that offer solutions to some of today's problems. He added that Best Choice gives youths a chance to get a better start in life.

Carter, formerly assistant director is senior marketing and state representative for the International Loan Network, a two-year-old company headquartered in Maryland. He just opened the firm's first regional office in Raleigh.

Saying that he does not consider what he did "unique," Carter said he wants to see others who have gained financial ability do the same thing, to give something back to their community. "So many young people seem to be in trouble. It is far different from when I was growing up," he said,

recalling the family support that he and his sister had. "Family structures have eroded, and there seems to be no one who is concerned...We have

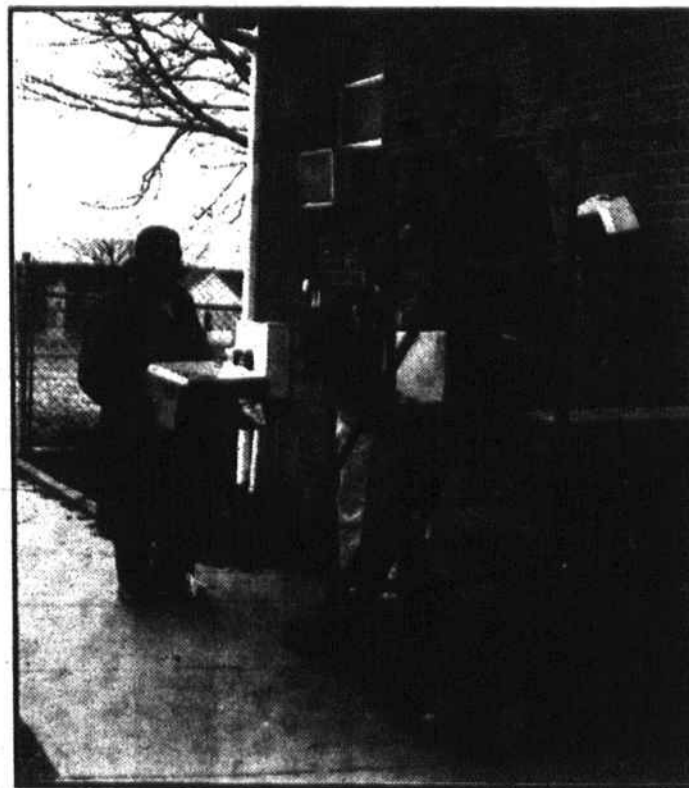


Photo by Elizabeth Martin

An elated Dorothy Graham-Wheeler, Best Choice Center director, leads the way into new center facility at 11th Street & Highland Avenue. Helping with moving day are (l-r): Rodney Mullins, program coordinator, and Chris Martin, youth coordinator.

to prepare the children to take over what their parents have started."

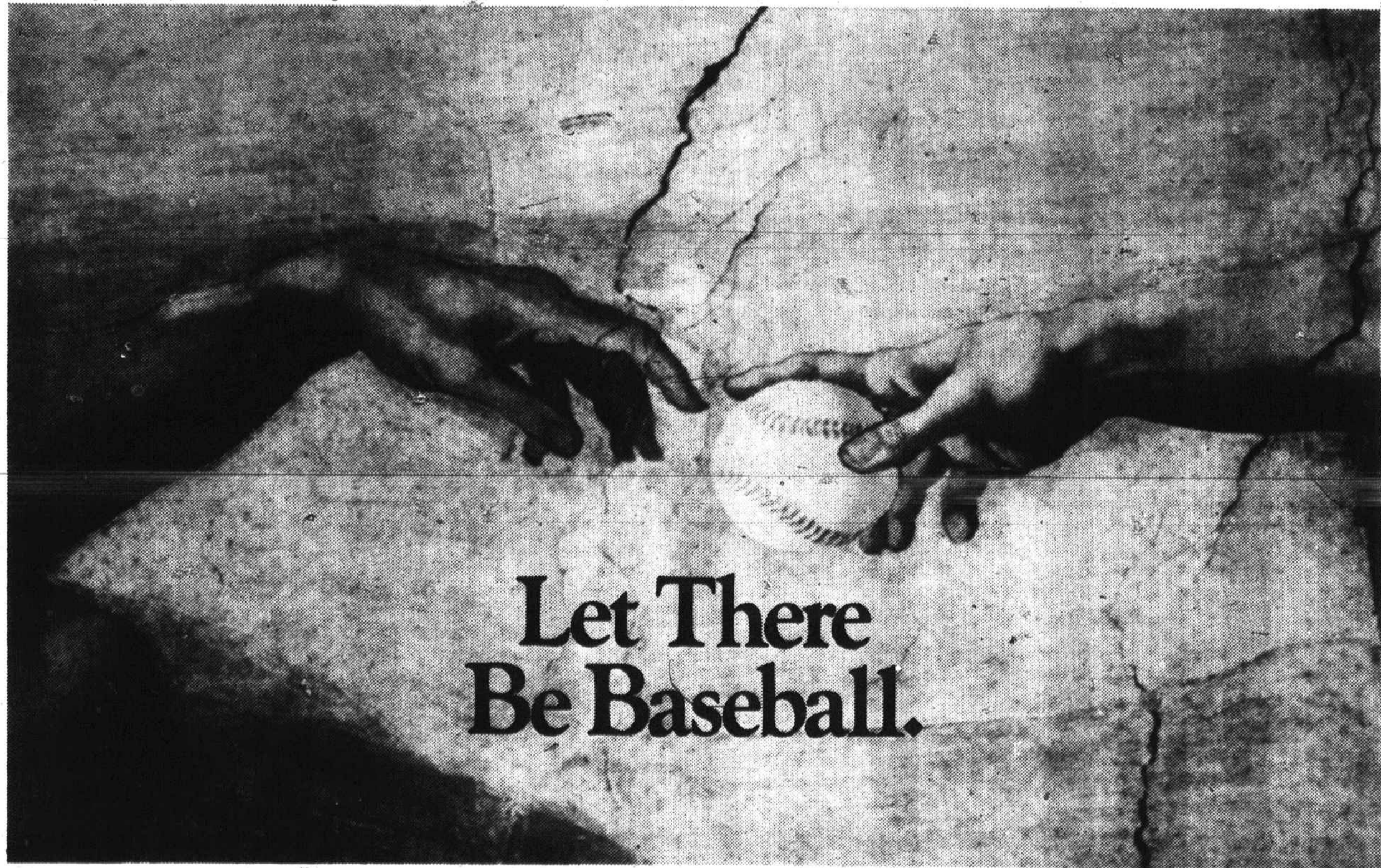
The old site will continue to be used until the end of January as a satellite location where meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous take place, according to Graham-Wheeler. She said that an intake person will be on-site during that time to handle drug and alcohol referrals. Whether or not the building will continue to be used will be decided at the end of the month by the center's board of directors.



Photo by Howard Ward

Dorothy Graham-Wheeler accepts \$25,000 check from her brother, Joseph Carter, making him the largest individual contributor to the center.

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VAMEI rallies forces to 'Stop Bush's War'

By PATRICIA SMITH-DEERING
Community News Editor

The Voices Against Middle East Intervention (VAMEI) will sponsor a bus pilgrimage to Washington, D.C., Jan. 19, to participate in a national peace rally protesting the intervention of the United States in the Persian Gulf. "We are in support of the troops, but we do not agree with the administration's policy," said Southeast Ward Alderman Larry Womble, founder of VAMEI.

The group will leave from Emmanuel Baptist Church at 1:30 a.m. and return at midnight. They will meet other peace marchers in Lafayette Park in Washington at 11 a.m. and proceed to the White House. There a rally will be held from noon until 5 p.m. According to Womble, approximately 100 organizations from across the country are sponsoring the march on Washington to "Stop Bush's War."

Womble said, "Some people are of the opinion that we're there for the wrong reasons." He added, "We haven't given the sanctions the test of time to work." He explained that the response of organizations like VAMEI is a growing demonstration that more and more people are supportive of the troops whose lives are endangered but not encouraged by the policies of President Bush to ignite a perilous war.

The cost for the one-day trip is \$30. Anyone interested in participating should confirm reservations by Jan. 15 with the Reverend John Mendez, (919) 788-7023, or Larry Womble, (919) 784-9373. Checks should be made payable to Emmanuel Baptist Church.