

Human Resource

By JEAN PETERSON

For more than ten years, during the Christmas season, people in North Carolina have been contributing gifts, cash, donations and their time for those persons residing in the state's psychiatric hospitals and mental retardation centers. Spearheading this gallant effort through the years have been the local chapters of the North Carolina Mental Association for Retarded Children.

The program, Operation Santa Claus, was initiated in order that every patient or resident of the state mental health facilities might be remembered at this special time of the year. Each facility has a number of "forgotten patients" that receive no mail, have no money and no regular visitors. If volunteers did not contribute their time, money or gifts to these patients, they would have little to look forward to, especially at Christmas.

In recent years, the task of coordinating the volunteer efforts of so many individuals,

church groups, civil clubs and organizations has been done by the Volunteer Services Director at each facility.

Donated articles which are intended for Christmas distribution should be new and unwrapped. The usual suggestions include clothing, games, toiletries, small luxury items and cash. Some institutions provide the community participants of Operation Santa Claus with a brochure outlining the gift suggestions in greater detail. Larger gifts for an entire ward, such as a television, coffee urn, record player or hair dryer are also welcomed.

At the mental retardation centers, which have children, only a few of which are under five years of age, toys for the younger children are often given in abundance. At least one center tries to provide each child with a variety of gifts—fruit, candy, toilet article and piece of clothing, in addition to a toy. Gifts of money allow the volunteer coordinators to purchase gifts to

fill in voids. Each facility serves the mentally retarded or mentally ill from all the counties in region, often receiving support for this project from all of the 1632 counties in each region.

In addition to the increasing number of donations every year, other activities at the facilities make the holiday season a time to be remembered for the patients and residents.

Several large organizations sponsor institution-wide parties, usually complete with Santa and gifts. The residents of three mental retardation centers receive a special treat in seeing Santa flown in by helicopter. Some of these centers demonstrate their holiday spirit to parents, friends and the community with an annual Christmas pageant to which the public is invited.

Operation Santa Claus is a result of many hours of volunteer time and thousands of gift donations by North Carolina citizens and groups. But volunteers agree that the look of surprise and happiness on the faces of the patients and children at the institutions makes it well worth the effort.



Rev. Jason Lee (Roger Mosley) an underworld hit man posing as a preacher takes dead aim on his assailant from MCM's "Sweet Jesus, Preacher Man."

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