

'The Center'

People of All Ages Drop In For Programs

By **MAGGIE MAURICE**
Free Press Lifestyles Editor

They call it the Center. The center for kids. The center for teen-agers. The center for senior citizens. Its full name is the Old North End Community Association Center.

Located on the corner of North Street and North Champlain Street, it was started with a government grant of \$2,500 in February. The work is done by volunteers, most of whom are members of the board.

"My group had to meet in a lot of places," said Lewella Ploof, 4-H leader who coordinates the youth programs. "Now we finally have a place where we can stay."

"We had to have an official name but everybody calls it the Center," said Gay McKenzie, member of the board.

Barbara Hockert coordinates the programs for senior citizens with Blanche Bushee and Edith Lawrence.

"It's catching on," she said. "There are other senior citizen centers, but they can walk here."

Robert Gordon, owner of Gordon Rubber Stamp Service on North Street, is president and treasurer of the executive board. Robert Ploof, who works at Claussen's Florists, is chairman. Elaine Charbonneau is secretary. In addition to the coordinators for seniors and youth, board members are Mary Lemons, assistant youth coordinator, Esther Sorrell, Jane Wheel, Lorraine Graham, Joyce and Jerry McEntee, and Bill Lawrence. Hockert is vice chairman.

Classes are scheduled by the day: Monday is cooking; Tuesday, sewing; Wednesday, art; Thursday, seniors, and leather; Friday, 4-H arts and crafts.

The Teen Club meets from 1 to 3 p.m. Saturdays. The Bike Shop is open all day.

But people drop in any afternoon. "There's always something to do," said Bobby John "B.J." Parrott, 17, of 669 Riverside Ave.

Last Friday was typical. A group of elderly people was making table decorations — Christmas trees made of candles, green net and stars. The children were painting dough ornaments with Lew Ploof. A couple of teen-agers were binding boughs into wreaths. And some were just sitting around talking.

There was just barely room to move around. Not that anyone minded. It was a cozy sight and the coffee pot was on in the kitchen.

Two children who looked about kindergarten age climbed on the couches. "I kinda adopted them," said one of the seniors.

Wreaths ready for an upcoming bazaar were strung on a line high in the store-front windows. Material for sewing was piled neatly in the other.

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Free Press Photos by IRENE FERTIK



The Old North End Community Association Center, top, fills its small building at the corner of North Street and North Champlain Street. Bobby Parrott, 17, shows off the Christmas mobile he made, right. Crystal Owen, 7, and Richard Vernor, 5, paint dough ornaments, above.

People of All Ages Drop In at Center

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"This used to be a pet store," Lorraine Graham said. "We had a lot of work to do, fixing it up. Everything has been donated, even the paint. Harry Wheel gave us linoleum for the kitchen. The counter and cupboards were just put in. Now they've cleaned out the basement and we're trying to have volunteers a couple of nights a week. If enough kids are interested, we'll set up programs."

The center has to be self-supporting. The grant paid the rent, the lights, the heat. There is no phone.

The children put on a circus in the summer. At Halloween, 46 showed up to have makeup put on to go with their costumes. And at the Champlain Valley Fair, the center's 4-H-ers entered two projects and both won first prize. One was the Christmas wreath, which they are selling now to raise money.

"It made us feel so good to win," Lemons said.

The trees made by the seniors were for a dinner Monday night in St. Joseph's Hall, where they took orders for the bazaar. Helen Terhune designed them.

"I saw them in Japan," said Terhune, who is Mary Lemons's sister. "My husband was in the Air Force and Mary's was in the Army. Both of us moved all over the country and abroad with our families. And now we're back home, about three houses apart on La-fountain Street.

"Mary has volunteered since at

the center since Day 1. When I got back in July, she said, 'Come over and see what we do.' Well, I did and I've been coming ever since. I just love it. I try to pass on my knowledge of crafts. I like working with the children and the seniors."

In addition to providing printed material for 4-H projects ("And don't forget Lew got her training from 4-H," Hockert said), the Vermont Extension Service has supported the cooking classes. Economist Sylvia Sprigg arrives weekly to give instruction. One week the kids made apple pies and took them home.

Few people know that Esther Sorrell, former state senator, is an accomplished seamstress. At the center, with sewing machines donated by the House of Sewing and the Extension Service (on loan), she teaches children and adults how to sew.

"We made some barbecue aprons. A couple of little girls are making skirts," she said. "Now we're making potholder mitts. They want to give them to their parents for Christmas.

"The materials — we've scrounged around. Some I bought. Lorraine Graham's mother brought a lot of stuff. It's totally volunteer.

"It's awfully hard work, with little kids. I go home exhausted. But one day I remember watching a 10-year-old boy showing an 8-year-old girl how to use the machine. In another case, a little girl was telling a 6-year-old, 'you can learn to sew. You can do something.'

"There's a lot of spin-off. Take B.J. My big thing is to teach him to

read. He's eager to help, eager to learn. That's important."

Several women, including Sorrell, Margaret A. McNeil and Esther Cohen, will go through a training program in order to teach remedial reading on a one-to-one basis.

Graham has been chairman of fund raising. The main project has been a raffle to keep the center going.

"My aim was \$2,000. I have almost \$1,300 so far," she said. "At

Christmas time, all the organizations are asking for donations. They're all good. But we feel, if people know about the center, they'll be more apt to help these kids."

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