

A Place to Call Home...

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FEATURE WRITER

With brilliant colors of gold, red, and orange, Autumn gradually sweeps across our area, painting a picture perfect landscape while nature prepares for winter. Frost scatters gently over the ground and the air becomes crisp, turning our thoughts to raking leaves, unpacking warm sweaters, and turning on the furnace. But for millions of American families, the first cold snap of the season brings about thoughts of survival, for they have suddenly found themselves without a home.



In the four years since it's inception, the St. Mark's Mission House has provided a safe haven for five of those families so far; lending a hand to those who are struggling to achieve emotional and financial stability. Penny Ivey and her three children are among the lucky few, having faced the possibility of homelessness less than a year ago. "We lived in a terrible trailer park," she confided. "I was about to be evicted and would have ended up living in my car if Mrs. Arnold hadn't come along."

Joyce Arnold, Chairperson of the Work Area on Missions and a 35 year member of St. Mark's United Methodist Church, started planning the mission house in 1996, along with friend and fellow church member Helen Morgan. Their plan involved purchasing a home where families in dire

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St. Mark's Mission House provides a safe haven for families in need.

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need could recover from their unfortunate economic circumstances and start over; where the ground on which they stood had a firm foundation. The two friends had the support of a loving congregation, but they needed financial backing as well. After bringing it to the church's attention, it took a full year to turn their dream into reality, but the positive outcome was well worth the wait. "It was such a wonderful time in the life of the church," Mrs. Arnold said proudly. "Many people became involved with the house; volunteering to fix it up before the first family moved in. I remember two doctors sitting on the floor painting the woodwork and having the best time of it. It's such a good feeling to help someone in need."

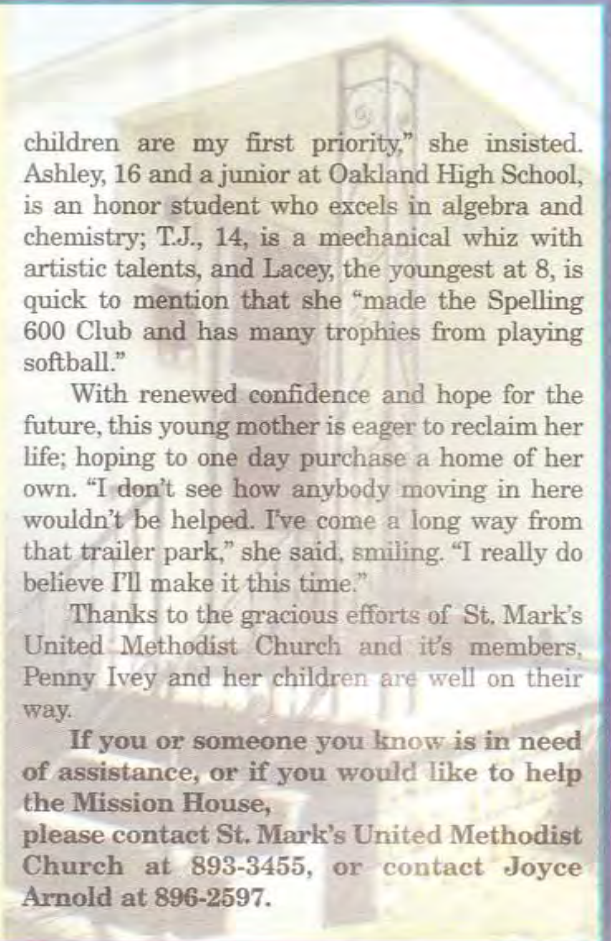
Possible tenants are most often discovered by word of mouth and must be interviewed by the mission board before given the chance to become part of the program. Questions about their background are asked, references are checked out and they must be in recovery from substance abuse to be considered; holding a job and attending a church of their choice is also a requirement. One-fourth of the family's salary

is relinquished each month for rent and held over in a savings account to be returned to them when their 6 month period has ended. Mission board members help tenants budget their money, find childcare if needed, and are available for family counseling and spiritual guidance.

With a fondness for her benefactors, Penny shares some of their kindness, "Mrs. Arnold took Ashley shopping last year to buy me a Christmas gift, and Mrs. Morgan has been helping me get my costs down at the new place. They have helped me so much...I care a great deal for all of them."

The Ivey family will move out of the Mission House this week, after taking up residence there for almost a year. Penny and her girls seem to be in good spirits about the move, giggling often and teasing each other while they cleaned and packed. "We're so excited about our new place, especially with having a dishwasher," she said grinning.

Penny is exceptionally proud of her children and their individual accomplishments, considering the emotional stress they have endured. "My



children are my first priority," she insisted. Ashley, 16 and a junior at Oakland High School, is an honor student who excels in algebra and chemistry; T.J., 14, is a mechanical whiz with artistic talents, and Lacey, the youngest at 8, is quick to mention that she "made the Spelling 600 Club and has many trophies from playing softball."

With renewed confidence and hope for the future, this young mother is eager to reclaim her life; hoping to one day purchase a home of her own. "I don't see how anybody moving in here wouldn't be helped. I've come a long way from that trailer park," she said, smiling. "I really do believe I'll make it this time."

Thanks to the gracious efforts of St. Mark's United Methodist Church and it's members, Penny Ivey and her children are well on their way.

If you or someone you know is in need of assistance, or if you would like to help the Mission House, please contact St. Mark's United Methodist Church at 893-3455, or contact Joyce Arnold at 896-2597.