

## Mom of 14 helps homeless families

# Longtime Demarest resident to be honored

By Christina Rossi

DEMAREST - A borough resident for 57 years and mother of 14 is being honored for 20 years of service helping homeless families.

Nancy Woods, 80, spends 40 hours a week and four nights a week as volunteer coordinator of the Interreligious Fellowship for Homeless Families (IRF) Emergency Family Shelter at St. Cecilia's R.C. Church in Englewood.

She and St. Cecilia's, as well as Women United in Philanthropy, will be honored at IRF's gala on Thursday, Nov. 13, at the Alpine Country Club in Demarest. Proceeds will benefit sheltering programs and services for families, children and individuals in the Bergen County area.

Ms. Woods grew up in New York and was educated at a boarding school in Long Island. She was living with her husband, George, now deceased, in an apartment in the Bronx with three children before moving to an old eight-bedroom Victorian in Demarest in 1951.

She was then faced with the challenge of raising her brood as a single mother and managed to also serve on Board of Education, Library Board and PTA.

Her children now range in age from 60 to 37; two live in Demarest, one in Dumont and two in Harrington Park.

At the shelter-"Fellowship House"-Ms. Woods has served as "grandmother" to 415 families who have gone in and out of the shelter program and manager of all the volunteers who staff the shelter daily. Fellowship House is staffed by congregations of all denominations



**Nancy Woods**

who provide meals, and chaperones who spend the night.

Ms. Woods also serves as IRF president "because no one else wanted to do it," she said.

"Hopefully, I've got an alert social conscience. I've been able to live comfortably and if I can help others do any better, I'll give it a shot."

The shelter is housed in the cafeteria of the former St. Cecilia's High School, which closed 26 years ago. The over 4,000 square foot room has personal cubicles for the families, many headed by single moms. It serves about 25 families annually. It would help more but because the high cost of living in Bergen County, many of the families stay on because they can't afford to move out, she said.

Many of the shelter's residents work during the day in offices, hospitals and stores. "Unless you earn over \$20 an hour, you can't afford to live in this county," she said.

"I find it rewarding to help people in miserable circumstances," she said.

"They're going to have to carry me out of here."

