

**NEWSMAKER: JEAN FORBATH**

## Samaritan says she's repaying some of life's blessings

The Orange County Human Relations Commission, detailed in a Register story Wednesday, takes on the causes of "the damned, the disheveled (and) the despised" as a county aide described it.

The commission is called upon to diffuse potentially explosive situations — such as the outcry that followed the accidental shooting of a 5-year-old black boy by a white Stanton policeman, and the mistaken deportation a 14-year-old Hispanic who was a legal resident.

Heading this group that champions the causes of the disadvantaged is Jean Forbath. A housewife and mother of seven children, ages 12 to 26, Forbath has been at the forefront of private efforts to help the county's disadvantaged for the past 14 years.

While having no direct power, Forbath said, the commission assists the county Board of Supervisors by acting as a "buffer" between the board and problems in housing, employment, police-community relations, health and education.

The commission has a staff of six to research these needs and act as moderators between police or government and the residents of the communities they serve. Forbath, 53, was appointed to the 11-member commission four years ago and has been its chairwoman the past two years.

Forbath, her husband, Frank, a Hughes Aircraft engineer, and four of their children live in a five-



Jean Forbath of Costa Mesa is chairwoman of the Orange County Human Relations Commission.

Hal Stoezle/The Register

bedroom, two-story house in Costa Mesa's Mesa Verde area. Although she lives on Club House Road, she said she does not feel comfortable with the clubhouse set. "We were just lucky to get the house when we did," she said.

Forbath was raised in Hollywood where her father worked for

the now-defunct RKO Studios. The then-Jean Swain married Frank Forbath in 1957. The couple moved to Costa Mesa two years later, and have lived in the same home for the past 21 years.

Her Human Relations Commission duties are only a small part of her usual 25-hour-a-week vol-

unteer work. Before Christmas, she said, the workload jumps to 40 hours a week as she finds county families to provide Christmas presents and a holiday dinner for low-income families — 900 of them last year.

Forbath said she spends two days a week in her unpaid job as

executive director of the Share Our Selves program and promotes it through speaking engagements. Share Our Selves is a non-profit organization that provides food, clothing, temporary shelter and emergency help on medical bills for the poor.

She and her husband founded the organization in 1970 with lofty goals: to tackle the needs of the county's poor. Initially, the group was based at the St. John the Baptist Catholic Church.

After four moves, Save Our Selves has settled its emergency-care offices at Costa Mesa's Rea Community Center on Hamilton Street. More than 15,000 poor people a month seek help there. Forbath said some come from as far away Fullerton and El Toro, although most are from Santa Ana and Costa Mesa. About half are Hispanic, she said. Many are homeless; 625 in October alone.

Forbath is also president of the board of directors of the Feedback Foundation, a non-profit organization that provides meals for about 2,500 elderly people a day at 27 sites throughout the county.

She was named Woman of the Year by the Costa Mesa Chamber of Commerce in 1983 for her volunteer work.

For all this, she is paid \$20 a month, a stipend for expenses from the Human Relations Commission. "I feel my life has been blessed in so many ways, this is something to pay back a little."

— Rod Speer/The Register