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Motel Price Hikes for Olympics May Create Crisis for the Poor

By JERRY HICKS, 4-10-84
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The Irvine Presbyterian Church is going to turn its sanctuary into a dormitory during the 1984 Summer Olympics to give some of the homeless a place to sleep for that time period.

But the church housing won't be for people who flock to the Southland with Olympic tickets but no motel reservations.

It will be for low-income people now living in Orange County motels who are expected to be displaced during the Olympics by skyrocketing motel prices.

Temporary Quarters

Officials from the Housing Coalition of Orange County estimate that about 4,000 Orange County residents are living in temporary quarters in motels and hotels because they can't afford permanent housing.

The coalition, which includes about 24 private social service agencies, began mailing requests Monday to more than 200 churches and synagogues in the county, seeking temporary shelter for these people during the Olympics, which begin July 28 and run through Aug. 12.

Unable to Pay

The coalition has not worked out all the details of its plan, but its leaders are moving ahead because they view the Olympic-period housing problem in Orange County as a major crisis.

"A lot of people will simply have to move out of their motels during the Olympics because they won't be able to pay the bill," said Wayne Kempe, a coalition leader, at a news conference Monday.



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Wayne Kempe: "We're looking for any help we can get . . . even blankets and bedding."



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Maya Dunne: "We must show . . . our deep concern for the homeless and poor . . ."

HOUSING: Crisis Foreseen for the Poor

"We're looking for any help we can get. If a church can't provide a place for people to sleep, maybe it could help out with blankets and bedding," said Kempe, who represents Lutheran Social Services in the coalition.

The Housing Coalition sent questionnaires about Olympic housing to 344 motels and hotels throughout Orange County.

Based on a response from 125 of the motels and hotels, the group determined that more than 2,000 units countywide are occupied by long-term residents as temporary housing.

Kempe said these people pay an average daily rate of \$18, but the rate is expected to jump to \$79 a day during the Olympics, based on the survey.

Rate Increase Outlined

"We've found that the prices of the major motels and hotels will only increase slightly during the Olympics," Kempe said. "But the middle-range motels, which is where most of these people we want to help are living, plan tremendous price increases during the Olympics, some of them more than \$100 a night."

The Ha'Penny Inn at 2151 East 1st St. in Santa Ana charges \$160 a week for two people. But during the Olympics, the weekly rate there for two people would be \$455, according

to a motel spokesman.

At another medium-priced motel, the La Palma Inn, at 2691 W. La Palma Ave. in Anaheim, the daily rate is \$34 (with no weekly rate), but that price will jump to \$120 a day for the Olympics, a spokesman there told The Times.

The Irvine Presbyterian Church, at 5 Meadowbrook in Irvine, volunteered its sanctuary for the Olympic period after learning about the survey results from the Housing Coalition.

"We must not only show our nation's strengths in the Olympics, but also our deep concern for the poor and homeless," said Maya Dunne, a church elder.

Coalition leaders said several other churches have expressed interest in the shelter plan.

The Housing Coalition may know more about what it needs right now than how it is going to handle things when the Olympic period begins.

For example, the Irvine Presbyterian Church can provide housing for only 15 people, which might be three or four families. If finding housing during the Olympic period is as difficult as the coalition fears, its leaders say there will have to be offers from many churches.

The coalition has not yet worked out plans for transportation of people who might have to travel great distances from where they currently reside.

Another problem for the coalition

is finding volunteers to keep temporary housing facilities open.

And the group's leaders say they don't know what to do about storing personal belongings of motel residents who move out of their rooms temporarily.

Also, no priorities have been established yet if there is not enough space for everyone seeking housing.

More Homeless Predicted

For example, Kempe estimated that the Southland could get an additional 3,000 homeless people during the Olympics, people who have tickets for events but no hotel or motel reservations, or people who will be drawn to the area simply because of the Olympics.

That estimate, he said, is based on figures provided by the Human Services Olympics Committee of the Inter-Religions Council of Southern California.

Kempe wasn't sure what would happen if there are more people seeking temporary church housing than there is housing.

"Our goal is to help families here in Orange County," said Jean Forbath, director of Share Our Selves, which is affiliated with the Housing Coalition. "We're talking about the single mother who has to work and has to live at a motel right now."

Kempe said the coalition would establish priorities in time for the Olympics.