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SIXTY-THIRD YEAR—NO. 30

BIRMINGHAM, OAKLAND COUNTY, MICHIGAN. THURSDAY, OCTOBER 24, 1940

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"Lead for Two"

By NELLIE HURLEY MINIFIE

IT WAS the summer before last that Mrs. Cleveland Walcutt first came to me about the Community Council, her head filled with plans, ideas and arrangements. Here it was, she told me then, the medium through which Birmingham could meet and solve its problems. Today, a year and a half later, she is the Community Council's first president, its guiding light, its strongest and staunchest supporter. And in that year and a half she has lost none of her enthusiasm.

"When plans were still in the formative stages, when the Community Council was only an idea lodged in the back of the minds of a handful of Birmingham men and women, the work involved would have made all but the most enthusiastic idealist hesitate in undertaking the project."

Casual Remark Responsible

And it might have been impossible but for the tenacity and the dogged persistence of those few who saw the entire Community Council grow from the casual remark dropped by Howard Y. McClusky, professor of education at the University of Michigan, when he spoke in Detroit to the program planners institute.

This week Mrs. Walcutt and I spoke again of the Community Council. We talked of the institute which met at the Community House, we spoke of the work that has been done by this group in the past year, we talked of what is yet to come, of the problems still unsolved, of the work that is to be done in its own particular orbit, doing useful work and devoting much of its efforts to community service.

Confusion Results

"I needn't point out to you," Mrs. Walcutt said, "that after a tremendous amount of confusion resulted, The University of Michigan extension department, for instance, calls to our attention that one year as many as three speakers were sent to one small community each to deliver the same address to a different organization."

Each club, she pointed out, is interested in community problems, but until the Council banded the groups together and gave them a common meeting ground each organization had its own perspective and few saw the community problems as a whole. Together, this power for good can give the community more service than the sum of the efforts of the individual clubs.

"If you grant," Mrs. Walcutt went on, "that each club is inter-

ested in problems directly concerning the community, I believe you must admit that a discussion group is the way of tackling these problems and not the lecture platform."

And that discussion group is the Community Council that meets four times each year, one of these meetings being the Institute which is a general afternoon and evening meeting that is open to the general public free of charge, whether or not the individual is a member of any club.

The Institute, Mrs. Walcutt would like it plainly understood, is not just another club organization, but rather it is a cooperating technique whose primary function is to coordinate the efforts of those clubs desiring to take active participation in any particular community problem.

Nothing has been established that was not there before the Community Council. There have always been clubs interested in adult education, there have always been organizations whose main object is community improvement. All the Community Council has done has been to give each Birmingham organization a chance to mingle with other clubs in the city, discover common bonds and approach the unsolved problems as a group rather than many small organizations trying each in its own way to accomplish what could more easily and quickly be accomplished as a unity.

That, in a very small nutshell is the function of the Community Council.

The preliminary work that went on before the council actually began to operate last fall hardly seems possible now that one looks back on it. For instance it seems hard to conceive that last summer when Mrs. Walcutt began to investigate the clubs in the city there was nowhere available a complete list of Birmingham organizations.

That list was compiled by her over a period of several months and it is available today only because the city directory was secured, the telephone directory was bought, the Community House came through with a partial list and The Eccentric submitted its

Question of Paying for Improvements In Subdivision Puzzles City Officials

Every real estate operator and owner of lots in unimproved sections of Birmingham will be interested in the puzzle now facing the City Commission.

The question is one of policy: When should the city-at-large bear part of the cost of laying sewer and water or improving streets?

In Pembroke Manor, City Manager Donald C. Egbert cited the example of the Pembroke Manor subdivision in the northern section, across the railway underpass. Owners of most of these lots is the Pembroke Manor Co., an organization of bondholders who took over when the original developers went broke, failing to improve the streets as promised, and failing to pay the bondholders. The bondholders now want to improve Buckingham road from Eton road to St. Andrews and plan to sell many houses on the street, Egbert said. (Part of the area is owned by others.)

"Should we make them pay the entire bill, including cost for the 26 lots owned separately?" Egbert asked; "or, should we make it a special assessment, which under the charter requires the city to bear 15 per cent of the cost?"

The City has followed both policies in the past. In cases where one owner held most of the property, the City has forced the developer to bear all costs. In other cases, where there have been many separate lot owners, like in the recent assessment for Villa road gravel, the City has followed the charter procedure and paid for 15 per cent of the costs.

"Is it fair to the bondholders?"

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Visits with Birmingham and Bloomfield Hills Women . . .

cert that came evening which would also expect a city-wide audience. This Community Council idea is Mrs. Walcutt's own particular pet. Being a sociologist—she holds a master's degree in this subject from the University of Michigan—she recognizes only too well the problems confronting a community and knows the only practical way of solving these problems is through face to face associations, "primary groups" to the sociologist.

"After all," she will tell you, "democracy was born in the town halls of the New England states. It had its beginning in small, compact groups that discussed their problems and flourished under free education and free discussion which stimulated and crystallized public opinion. The very basis of democracy is the solving of our own local problems; and the best way to do this is by meeting our neighbors, exchanging views, and by working together to arrive at a satisfactory answer."

A Model for Michigan

That Eugene B. Elliott, state superintendent of schools, also believes this, is evidenced by the fact that he sent a message to superintendents of schools throughout the state advising the formation of councils in their communities. As he told the Governor, the council is really the answer to the youth problem as it exists today.

"Organize the Community Council and through the community spirit engendered we can solve our adults' problems and through that the problems of our youth," he said.

The state department of public instruction, finding Birmingham a center in the field, is using the Birmingham Community Council's history, constitution and Institute minutes as a guide for other cities wishing to set up a council.

Yes, the Council is Mrs. Walcutt's pet. She is in a large measure responsible for its instigation in Birmingham and she is, perhaps more than any other woman, responsible for the place which it occupies today in this community.

The calendar committee is particularly interesting one, Mrs. Walcutt pointed out. In past years it has not been an unusual occurrence to have two, perhaps three, speakers or programs booked for a single night, not because the clubs were vying with one another, but because there was no central clearing house through which they would be able to learn in advance of the plans of other organizations.

By using this calendar, Mrs. Walcutt believes there need never be another major conflict in speakers or concerts. "That does not mean," she hastened to explain, "that there will never be more than one thing going on in one evening, for Birmingham is too progressive and dynamic a community for that. But it does mean that if one club is planning to bring a speaker who expects to draw an audience from all over the city, there will not be a con-

Calendar Eliminates Conflicts

In the past year the calendar committee has been working on, and now is completing, a large month-to-month calendar which is kept at the Community House and any club in Birmingham, merely by contacting the House is able to know whether the date selected is a busy day for the community.

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