

Homeless teen-age mothers

Malverne parish welcomes MOMMAS

Malverne — Pat Shea, director of MOMMAS, a home for homeless teen-age mothers and their babies, says she feels very comfortable at their new location in a house owned by Our Lady of Lourdes Church here.

The previous MOMMAS house, in Wantagh, was sold by the landlord. At about the same time, Our Lady of Lourdes Parish Council was considering possible uses for their vacant house, which had been the home of the parish custodian, now deceased.

Though opposition to using the house for teen-age unwed mothers and their babies was expressed at an open meeting, "there was also a lot of support," said Mrs. Shea. The fact that those who favored this use of the house came out to voice their support made the difference, she believes.

People of the community have rallied magnificently, said Mrs. Shea, to make the house a home. The parish St. Vincent de Paul conference played a major role in the renovation of the house, enlisting volunteers of all ages. Vincentian Joseph Brennan "was really really marvelous," she noted.

Women of the parish decorated the various rooms of the house.

Renovation was expected to cost \$40,000. This was cut to just \$10,000 because so much work and material was donated.

"There's been a great variety of support from local merchants not only in Malverne, but also Valley Stream, Oceanside and East Rockaway," Mrs. Shea said. "It's been a beautiful experience."

Work began just after Christmas; the house opened June 1. It can house four mothers and their babies. The young mothers accepted must be drug- and alcohol-free and agree to attend school or work to prepare themselves to live independently with their babies.

"The need is so great," said Mrs. Shea, "that we have to make hard choices as to which girl can be accepted into the house and who must be refused." Those refused usually go on to live on welfare in a rented



Pat Shea admires a newborn at MOMMAS house.

room somewhere "if they're lucky enough to find one that will accept babies."

The house is rent-free. Other expenses are met by donations and money from the state-funded Maternity and Early Childhood Foundation, which Mrs. Shea identified as "a program for alternatives to abortion."

While the Suffolk County Department of Social Services pays a per diem for each girl in a MOMMAS house, the Nassau DSS does not.

A house staff of a daytime and nighttime coordinator will be augmented, Mrs. Shea hopes, by a large pool of volunteers.

Already three volunteers a day come to assist the housemother on duty. Volunteers can also tutor, or teach the young mothers needed skills such as cooking, cleaning, shopping and budgeting, or provide recreational activities.

MOMMAS has on hand just now a sufficient supply of baby clothing and equipment, but needs funds and food.

For more information, to donate or to volunteer, contact MOMMAS, phone 593-0079.