

The first 40 years

In 1917, the Washtenaw County Red Cross received its official charter when Dr. Henry Douglas became the first chairman. Membership in the local chapter increased almost tenfold in the first few years of its existence.

This Chapter can be proud of all its fine accomplishments over the decades. Our history in service began during World War I and World War II when Red Cross volunteers produced surgical dressings for soldiers.

Throughout the Great Depression, they aided the needy by distributing clothing, government grain, and other relief supplies. It was at the time of World War II that official service groups began to form, and the Chapter began to collect blood for the armed forces. The Chapter also began developing training programs such as: First Aid, Nurse's Aid, and Home Nursing.

Blood Program

The blood program started in 1940 when the American Red Cross began the large-scale processing of blood to separate plasma from the red and white cells so that it could be used as a "universal" blood type for transfusion into any individual.

The first blood clinic opened in February 1942. Two hundred and six donors gave blood to be used for the armed forces. In 1945 at the end of World War II, the Michigan State Health Department requested that a program be developed to make blood available for use in civilian hospitals.

Disaster

The American Red Cross has always been involved with disaster relief. The first Red Cross Chapter was founded in Dansville, New York, in 1881. One month after opening their doors a disaster relief effort was made to aid citizens of Michigan affected by the Thumb Area Fire.

When a five-person "Civil Relief" team was appointed to assist victims of the cyclone that struck Scio Township in June 1917, Washtenaw County formed its own disaster relief committees. Among those who served on this committee was Henry Douglas, who was soon to become the first chairman of the local Red Cross chapter. The first formal disaster organization was established in 1934, and the Red Cross began working closely with the county office of Civil Defense to provide more efficient relief services to those in need.

Fund Raising Membership

The people of Washtenaw County have always been generous in providing funds

needed to carry on essential Red Cross services. The first local chapter fundraiser-- the War Fund Drive of 1918-- was an enormous success, as almost double the \$25,000 goal was realized.

Home Service

In 1917, the Chapter began supplying comfort bags to members of the armed forces from Washtenaw County. Towards the end of the same year, the Home Service program was established to provide the families of World War II draftees with information and assistance in business affairs, government allotments, financial aid, furloughs due to illness and death, and correspondence with the War Department.

A year after the war ended, the nature of the committee's tasks changed to meet new needs. Returning soldiers needed assistance in finding employment, financial aid, and advice regarding government allowances and insurance. The Home Service Committee became responsible for furnishing the clubroom at the Ypsilanti American Legion Post 282, and for assembling Christmas bags for servicemen stationed throughout the world. In addition to all this, the committee began dealing with impoverished families, as there were no agencies specializing in welfare work at the time. Even today the Red Cross continues to act as a liaison between soldiers and their families.

Junior Red Cross

The year 1917 marked not only the beginning of a Red Cross Chapter in Washtenaw County, but also the establishment of junior membership in the National Red Cross organization.

After World War II, the suffering of children in war-torn countries prompted the beginning of two vital Junior Red Cross programs: the American Red Cross Children's Fund, and the Gift Box Program.

In the early '30s, when the nation suffered from drought and depression, junior members engaged in activities for the relief of those in need. The records show that Washtenaw County members helped to preserve fruits and vegetables to give to the needy.

WORLD WAR II saw an increase in Junior Red Cross activity. It was a new experience for junior volunteers to provide articles for able-bodied servicemen, as well as for the hospitalized. Home economics, industrial arts, and art classes, elementary students, 4-H groups, and other children's organizations made ashtrays, lapboards, games, kit bags, scuffs, lap robes, holiday articles, writing portfolios, menu cards, and dance cards for the armed forces.

With the end of WORLD WAR II, there was an expansion in programs of international relief and goodwill. The Washtenaw County Junior Red Cross contributed by helping to organize school chests to aid in the rehabilitation of schools in war-depleted countries, international school correspondence albums,

international exchange, school arts, and recordings of school music, all to establish better international understanding.

Nursing Services

The Red Cross was a pioneer in the field of Public Health Nursing. During the influenza epidemic of 1919, the Red Cross registered nurses to assist in homes where the disease was prevalent. Families who could not afford medical treatment were given Red Cross financial assistance, and the overall efforts of the organization helped to greatly reduce the loss of life throughout the epidemic.

The program was soon expanded to include a Baby Clinic, work with crippled and mentally retarded children, and classes in home hygiene and care of the sick for junior high and high school students. The programs were gradually taken over by the city government and the school system in the 1930s, though the Red Cross still helped furnish nursing services for the rural areas.

Among their many other great achievements, Red Cross nurses helped with victims of the Mississippi flood in 1937, served in the reserves for the Army and Navy in 1941, and worked with polio sufferers.

Later nursing services included the enrollment of nurses for disaster and special training; the use of nurses with special qualifications to teach the care of the sick; nurse's aides; and service in blood banks. Volunteer registered nurses perform valuable services in every county blood clinic.

First Aid & Home Nursing

In 1926, the Chapter began offering training in first aid. Classes in hygiene and care of the sick started soon thereafter in the 1930's. It was the aim of the Red Cross to teach at least one member of every family the necessary skills to care for a sick and injured relative and to be able to assist professional personnel in homes, hospitals, or shelters in the case of an emergency. Gradually the courses spread throughout the county and into the school system. The training became known as "Home Nursing," and hundreds of thousands of women throughout the United States received certificates.

Service Skills

Arts and Skills

In 1945, a Red Cross Arts and Skills Corps was organized in Washtenaw County. The primary purpose of this program was to aid in the rehabilitation of disabled veterans at the Percy Jones Hospital in Battle Creek. Classes in weaving, drawing, painting, ceramics, were provided along with materials and supplies, and the patients who participated were allowed to keep the articles they made.

During the first six months of operation, volunteers from Ann Arbor and Ypsilanti ran the program at this hospital. The disabled veteran who asked, "What could I learn to do with one hand?" often found an answer from the Chapter volunteers who showed him how new interests and skills could be developed. In the end, veterans were often left feeling pride in their achievements.

In 1949, members of the program also started working at the Leland Sanatorium in Ypsilanti. Yarn left over from work at Percy Jones Hospital was made available to Leland various patterns and colors, some of which were used to make covers on the patients' beds. Leather-tooling became so popular that it had to be curtailed because it began to interfere with rest periods essential to persons recovering from tuberculosis. However, oil painting, embroidery, and textile painting activities flourished.

The program then expanded to include the Ypsilanti State Hospital. Red Cross volunteers worked in the Occupational Therapy Center and in the large day rooms. With guidance from the Registered Occupational Therapists, volunteers helped keep patients' hands busy. They also assisted in putting on special events like dances and carnivals for the benefit of the patients.

Canteen

The first canteen course was completed in March 1942. On May 13, 1942, coffee and doughnuts were served to the first group of draftees, and up to July 1, 1942, approximately 1,500 persons had been served, including 775 blood donors. The Manufacturers of Ann Arbor and vicinity presented the Corps with a Mobile Kitchen, and a Laboratory Canteen was established at Chapter's Headquarters.

At the invitation of the USO, the Canteen Corps took over the supervision of the kitchen at the USO and served on weekends. The work with draftees continued and, about four trips a month, were made to the depot. Trips were also made to football games where nearly 1,000 soldiers from Camp Custer and WACs from Detroit were served.

Work with service personnel continued throughout the war. The Mobile Canteen met the morning trains and distributed free sandwiches and coffee. Red Cross blood donor clinics for the armed forces were held regularly in the county and the Corps served refreshments to donors.

At the end of the war, the Corps began serving veterans from Percy Jones Hospital who came to Ann Arbor for football games, and, beginning in 1946, community groups began requesting the services of the Corps. After 1948, most of the Corps' work was in blood clinics, feeding children attending Crippled Children's Clinics, and preparing and serving luncheon for the executive committee of the Chapter for their monthly meetings. Occasional coffee hours were also held at the Veterans Administration Hospital.

Entertainment and Supply

From 1932 to 1933, the Chapter's supply committee was responsible for the distribution of flour, vegetable seeds, cotton yard goods, and clothing, which was donated by the government.

With the outbreak of WORLD WAR II, Chapter activity increased greatly. One of the new committees formed was the "Camp and Hospital Service Committee." The purpose of this committee was to fulfill the needs for personal services and morale-building items in army camps and hospitals. Christmas gifts, furniture, and entertainment were provided for Camp Crowder, and homemade cookies and Christmas gifts were sent to Percy Jones General Hospital in Battle Creek. At this time the Red Cross also collected money for and supervised the delivery of thirty-five wheelchairs for disabled veterans.

In 1944, the University of Michigan Athletic Department gave tickets to the patients in Army and Veterans Hospitals who were able to attend the home football games. The Washtenaw County Red Cross arranged to transport these visitors by bus and Motor Corps, and to provide them with luncheon and dinner on game days. Many of the patients stayed overnight at the university dormitories and were also entertained at breakfast Sunday morning.

With peacetime, the Red Cross' "supply" division merged with the "entertainment" division. "Supply" was responsible for the "Christmas on the High Seas" project and for providing gifts of occupational therapy materials and equipment to the VA Hospital, along with flowers and holiday decorations for the VA and the County Hospitals, as well as the Veterans Readjustment Center. Cartons of Christmas boxes were sent to the Seattle Port of Embarkation where they were distributed to the servicemen who do not receive anything from home on Christmas Day. The committee also furnished ward entertainment for patients in the Ann Arbor VA Hospital, and continued to host dinners for the veteran patients attending the football games at the University of Michigan Stadium.

Gray Ladies

The Gray Lady service for military hospitals started in Washtenaw County in August 1943. Twenty-eight women received certificates and began duties in Willow Run Station Hospital the following month. In addition to work in the wards, they catalogued and operated a complete library. By the time the hospital closed in 1944, the Gray Ladies had served a total of 1,800 hours.

A class was then organized and services were provided at Percy Jones Hospital in Battle Creek and at the Leland Sanatorium in Ypsilanti. In 1956, the University of Michigan Health Service asked Gray Ladies to assist in the medical examinations of women students. Gray Ladies also assisted in influenza immunizations in October of the same year.

At the request of the Washtenaw County Health Department, volunteer service was provided to the Child Health Conference at Willow Run and Ypsilanti. When the Veterans Administration Hospital was opened in 1953, our Gray Ladies started service there beginning on the day of its dedication.

A new field opened to our Gray Ladies in 1954-helping with the mentally ill at Ypsilanti Service Hospital. The use of the new tranquilizing drugs had increased the need for volunteers. With the operation of the blood program, Gray Ladies aided in all blood clinics.

Motor Service

Motor Service in Washtenaw County Chapter was organized in the winter of 1940. Before this time some volunteers had been doing Chapter work with their own cars.

Virginia Schumaker, a Ford Motor Company worker, saw a need for such a service and went to Detroit to study Motor Mechanics. Later she taught Motor Mechanics classes composed of volunteers from the Chapter Motor Service. Funds for the first vehicle were raised by the University Faculty Wives Club and the Junior Chamber of Commerce.

During the war, ten Motor Service drivers went to Fort Wayne to serve as relief truck drivers for the army. Our volunteers drove special Army equipment for Bond Drives and received an award from the Army for this service.

From 1940 to 1957, service was provided throughout the county covering more than 650,000 miles. Some of these services included: delivery of kit bags to draftees, delivery of United Fund materials, and the transportation of volunteers and materials to blood banks and hospitals. The Motor Service was also responsible for transporting amputees, crippled children, and tubercular patients to treatment facilities.

Nurse's Aids

Shortly after the outbreak of WORLD WAR II, the need for relief in local nursing situations was critical since the armed forces were recruiting all nurses possible. There was a shortage of women with nursing skills who could fill this gap, so the Red Cross undertook the tremendous task of recruiting and training Nurse's Aides to meet the need.

By 1944, over 210 aides were trained in an 80 hour course, and served at St. Joseph Mercy and University Hospitals in Ann Arbor and Beyer Memorial Hospital in Ypsilanti. From the time of organization in 1942, volunteers had contributed half a million hours in this field. After the war ended, there was a reduction in this type of service.

The main task of these trained persons then became service in our blood clinics. Nurse's aides handled bottles, took measurements, and assisted nurses at the beds. During 1956-7, 138 volunteer nurse's aides who serve nine hundred forty-four hours in blood clinics. Later, volunteers were also recruited by the VA hospital

Production

Within months of receiving its charter, the Washtenaw Red Cross went to work producing clothing as well as dressings, bandages and comfort kits to meet the needs of World War II articles such as summer bed shirts, hospital pajamas, layettes, aviator waistcoats, sweaters, mufflers, helmets, trench caps, paper line vests, leggings, comfort pillows, and socks were made in quantity. Central cutting was developed to facilitate the sewing of clothes and to reduce waste.

Women were urged to knit to help save the lives of Belgian and French refugees. Requests were also made for contagious ward masks during the flu epidemic.

After the war an appeal was made for relief items for European war victims. Production continued to help meet this need. Over half a million items were produced from October 1917 to January 1919. In the years prior to the depression, the main articles produced were: layettes for babies, hospital supplies for Camp Custer, Braille work for the blind and Christmas bags for the soldiers in foreign service.

With the tragedy of the depression, a new call came to the Red Cross. Congress authorized hundreds of thousands of bales of cotton to be turned into clothing.

In 1932, 800 families sought the help of the Washtenaw County Red Cross. The Chapter distributed flour and clothing to assist them in their need.

By 1933, the number of needy families had risen to 2,100 and many groups such as the Needle Work Guild, Kings Daughter, Women's Club, League of Catholic Women, American Legion Auxiliary, provided their assistance through the Red Cross.

With the outbreak of WORLD WAR II, European war victims became the real concern of the American people again. Warm clothing and blankets, were needed, especially in areas not yet occupied.

Sewing groups and production units were organized in Ypsilanti, Saline, Dexter, Manchester and Platt, as well as in Ann Arbor. Women brought their own portables and other sewing machines were borrowed. By 1941, 450 workers were engaged in this important work. The number gradually increased to 850 with nine production units often working on an assembly line. Five centers were added for British relief and sewing was done in Manchester, Dexter, Milan, Chelsea and Saline. Even a night shift was organized. Reports indicated that

95% of the material sent abroad was delivered safely. Items were also produced for Army, Navy and convalescent hospitals.

Following WORLD WAR II production continued for the benefit of the war victims in Europe, but at a lesser level. Production groups also made hospital supplies for the VA hospital, and bandages, flags and clothing for burn-out victims.

Staff Aides

Staff Aid Service was established at the Washtenaw County Chapter in 1942. Members made crucial contributions to the war effort by manning the switchboard, typing and mimeographing, and by performing other necessary and helpful tasks to help expand Chapter service programs. They also assisted at clinics and did record-keeping and correspondence for other Chapter committees such as fund-raising.

In peacetime, staff aides acted as registrars at blood banks and helped handle administrative work for the Chapter.

Veterans Administration Hospital Representative

When the Veterans Administration Hospital opened in October of 1953, the Red Cross was asked to supply volunteers in various services including Gray Lady, Nurse's Aide, Arts and Skills, Staff Aide and Motor Service. Our Production groups filled a tremendous need during the first two years for thousands of articles including drapes for the surgery rooms and linens.

The Washtenaw County Chapter had a hospital representative and an alternate on the Veterans Administration Volunteer Service Council, which was composed of representatives from all the service organizations who responded to the hospital's requests for goods and services. The representative acted as a liaison between the hospital and the Chapter, forwarding requests and interpreting the needs for the program chairman.

The Chapter Committee on Entertainment and Supply provided a variety of outstanding entertainment events for the patients. Motor Services transported the patients throughout the year to plays, concerts, football and baseball games, and picnics, and also transported individual patients and the hospital administration.

Water Safety

In 1927, the Chapter joined with the Boy Scouts of America to put on swimming classes and lifesaving courses for the benefit of the entire county. However, the large-scale movement in water safety did not begin until 1932 when a demonstration was held at the University of Michigan intramural pool as part of a concerted effort to reduce the number of drownings in the county. This program was followed by a four-week instruction course co-sponsored by the Chapter water safety committee, police department, fire department, University Hospital, Y.M.C.A., and the Ann Arbor News. Since that time, the water safety program

has become an annual project of the Washtenaw County Chapter. Each year instructors' courses are provided to train young people how to give water safety instruction to both children and adults.

The efforts of this chapter and other chapters throughout the United States have been in part responsible for the drastic reduction in the drownings in our country. Drowning remains however the largest single cause of accidental deaths for young people age 5 to 14, and the Red Cross will continue in its efforts to further reduce this appalling loss of life.