



SOS staffers — Strengthen Our Sisters shelter staff members (from left): Mary Brooks DeGroat (advocacy director), Betty Cannon (night house mother) and Sarah Wiggins (day house mother) attended last week's West Milford Township Council meeting.

— Photo by Becky Schmoyer

SOS shelter a haven for violence victims

By **BECKY SCHMOYER**

Strengthen Our Sisters (SOS), a program which provides support and shelter for the victims of domestic violence, currently operates a shelter in West Milford Township.

Director Sandra Ramos founded the program, which now operates many shelters in Northern New Jersey, out of her home 21 years ago. Receiving requests for help from women living in the area, she became aware of the need for a shelter in upper Passaic County. The pro-

gram stresses the importance of opening local shelters so that women seeking assistance in rural parts of the county are not forced to relocate to an unfamiliar inner-city location.

The shelter provides a home, food and support services to its clients and its client's families. It is run on a cooperative basis with the women playing a major role in all aspects of the operation, planning meals, acting as "house mothers," offering support to each other and answering calls for help. The program is

directed at forming a working bond between people to help the victims gain independence and to become assertive. The staff also assists clients in applying for emergency assistance and permanent housing. The theme of the shelter is "pass it on."

House Mother Sarah Wiggins said that children from families living at the shelter, sometimes arrive severely battered and have emotional problems. The staff does its best as "one big family" to accommodate the needs of the kids, she said. Current plans include several trips and parties on Halloween and Christmas.

The West Milford shelter is located on four acres and currently can accommodate 17 families. Although partially funded by the state, the program also relies on private donations.

For further information on the Passaic County branch of Strengthen Our Sisters, contact Executive Director, Sandy Ramos, (201) 831-0898.

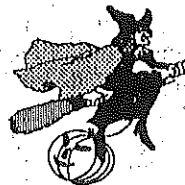
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MIDNIGHT MADNESS



SALE



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