

# West Milford threatens to shut down home for 2004



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Penni in her bedroom at Sunflower House, a shelter for seniors and the disabled operated by Strengthen Our Sisters. The shelter violates coc

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## WEST MILFORD

It's been years since Dolores Lougheed has been able to afford a place of her own.

Now 75, the Paterson native has baby-sat, been a diner hostess, and worked the line in more factories than she can remember. But after five car accidents stole her strength and a fire took away her possessions, Lougheed ran out of luck — and money.

Then she heard about Strengthen Our Sisters, which operates women's shelters in rural, northern Passaic County. Now she lives in her own room at Sunflower House, a homey, two-story structure on Old Route 23.

"Things are so expensive, I couldn't go anywhere," Lougheed said. "If we can't stay here, what will they do with

us? Will someone be willing to give us a room that they are not using?"

It's not clear how much longer she'll be able to call Sunflower House home. Nearly \$600,000 in fines threaten to shut down the shelter and bankrupt its parent organization, the Hewitt-based Strengthen Our Sisters.

When it opened the shelter without proper paperwork in December 2002, Strengthen Our Sisters broke several zoning and building codes, officials say. They also say that's the case at each of the organization's seven buildings in town, which include another shelter, job-training sites, a day-care center, and a thrift shop.

"They have very good intentions, but they feel they are exempt from the law," said Kurt Wagner, township construction officer. "If we allow them not to comply, we have to allow everyone

See **SHELTER** Page L-5



"Is it more important to file the right piece of paper, or saying on?" said Sandra Ramos, director of Strengthen Our