

# 'Mother' Branch to hear a community's thanks

**Dave Howland**

PENINSULA TIMES TRIBUNE

On a recent afternoon One-dia Branch cooked some hot dogs and instant noodles to take to a homeless mother and her two little girls.

The woman had been wrapping herself and her daughters in a blanket to keep warm at night, Branch said, and she needed the food and some cash to make it through the week.

Known simply as "Mother" to many in East Palo Alto, Branch has helped clothe and feed the needy on the Peninsula since 1955.

On Saturday, beneath the brightly colored stained glass Jesus that watches over the Baptist church she and her husband founded 35 years ago, friends will honor Branch for her many years of service to the community.

Branch collects food, clothes and furniture from a network of churches in Los Altos, Menlo Park and Woodside and hands it to people who come to her for help.

Over the years, she has

won countless commendations, plaques and trophies that decorate her wall and litter a small cabinet in the cosy living room of her Farington Way home.

But the kind words and the gospel music that will flow to her Saturday are by no means a celebration of the end of her career.

"I just sit there and listen to people say nice things," Branch said. "But my slogan is, 'You're not really living until you live for others,' and I have to prove that."

Branch said she is still trying to prove herself and "bring sunshine" to people in a community where the number of needy have grown with the rest of the population.

In fact, Branch is now looking to expand her operation.

Over the years her garage has become stacked dangerously full of furniture and baskets of coats and blankets, and so she is searching for a larger space with a low rent.

Please see **MOTHER, B-6**

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More information is available by calling Rita Levy at (415) 967-2770. served for a charge of \$1.

Biog - Branch, "Mother"

# MOTHER/ Storage space has been a problem

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"Isn't this a mess?" she said, pushing aside bags to find the light switch. "You can see how badly I need a new place."

Before moving the charity into her home 15 years ago, Branch moved between a handful of locations across the city.

Days before Thanksgiving in 1977, a fire destroyed her holiday stockpiles in a store she rented at the old Nairobi Shopping Center on Bay Road.

Branch persisted and within days moved into a small shopping center at the corner of Willow Road and Newbridge Street. Just as everything was in place, heavy rains poured through a leaky roof and destroyed many of the new donations.

But her intense Baptist faith combined with the joy of helping people survive have kept Branch in the business of looking after the needy, she said.

The celebration honoring Onedia Branch begins at 7 p.m. Saturday at the St. John Baptist Church, 1050 Bay Road, East Palo Alto. The Rev. Robert Fairley will lead the service.



JILL P. MOTT / PENINSULA TIMES TRIBUNE

Space for Onedia Branch's personal possessions is becoming scarce because she is storing so many items for needy people.