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Change terminates housemother program

by Rachel Dutch

With the changing picture of dormitory life, the image of housemothers has also changed. When former Dean of Men John Stewart hired housemothers 15 years ago, he told them they were to train the boys in the social graces—pulling out chairs and opening doors. Stewart felt women would improve the atmosphere in the dorms.

The advent of co-ed dorms and parietals means the men see women elsewhere than in classes; before housemothers were the only female to talk to in the dorm.

Ten years ago, Ella Smith and Peg Hashey, the last housemothers at UMO, were hired for Chadbourne and Estabrooke Halls. They since have moved to other dorms and now live in Cumberland and Oxford. "When these women retire they will not be replaced," says Donna Hitchens, assistant director of residential life.

Mrs. Smith, who considers herself a liberated woman, will retire this June. She says she will miss the boys and the noise. This feeling, she says, is a far cry from the way she felt when she first accepted the job.

"I was supposed to be in Orono on September 8 and on Labor Day I was ready to tell them to forget it. I was frightened to death of the whole idea. Then my son and daughter-in-law looked at the job description and said it was what I'd been doing all my life. So here I am and I've loved all of it," she remarked.

Mrs. Smith says she is considering writing a book on her experiences here at UMO entitled *I Lived with 200 Men*. Both Mrs. Hashey and Mrs. Smith continue to remain in touch with

students in their first dormitories. This year Mrs. Smith entertained 29 former students over Homecoming weekend. "They knew this was my last year and so they made a special effort to come," she said.

Both women prefer men's dorms. They say men are much more direct and open. "If they don't like your dress, they'll tell you. Then I go and send it to my sister," says Mrs. Smith.

Commenting on the passing of housemothers, Mrs. Hashey, who has

the 14 individuals it provides room and board for in Hilltop," she said.

Changes at UMO in the past few years have effected the role of housemothers. When they were first hired, Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Hashey handed out mail, sports equipment, chaperoned parties and lounges. Now their role in the dorms has become largely advisory, although they are told to put in a 40 hour week.

Mrs. Hashey views the social changes as being for the better. "Before the boys had to ask me to even have a girl in the



MA HASHEY



MA SMITH

three years left before retirement, stated, "They're going to have to tell me to go. I don't want to leave."

Mrs. Hashey also can not understand why housemothers are being replaced with married head residents. "Most of them have children. Their doors always are locked. It would be so much cheaper for the university to have us instead of

lounge. Now it's much more natural. Everyone is happier—you can see it in their faces. This is living, not just a place to hang your hat," she said.

Neither housemother has tried to give advice unless they were specifically asked for it. "We are available for whatever they need—not just 'tea and sympathy.' The boys come and tell us happy things, too," Mrs. Smith remarked.