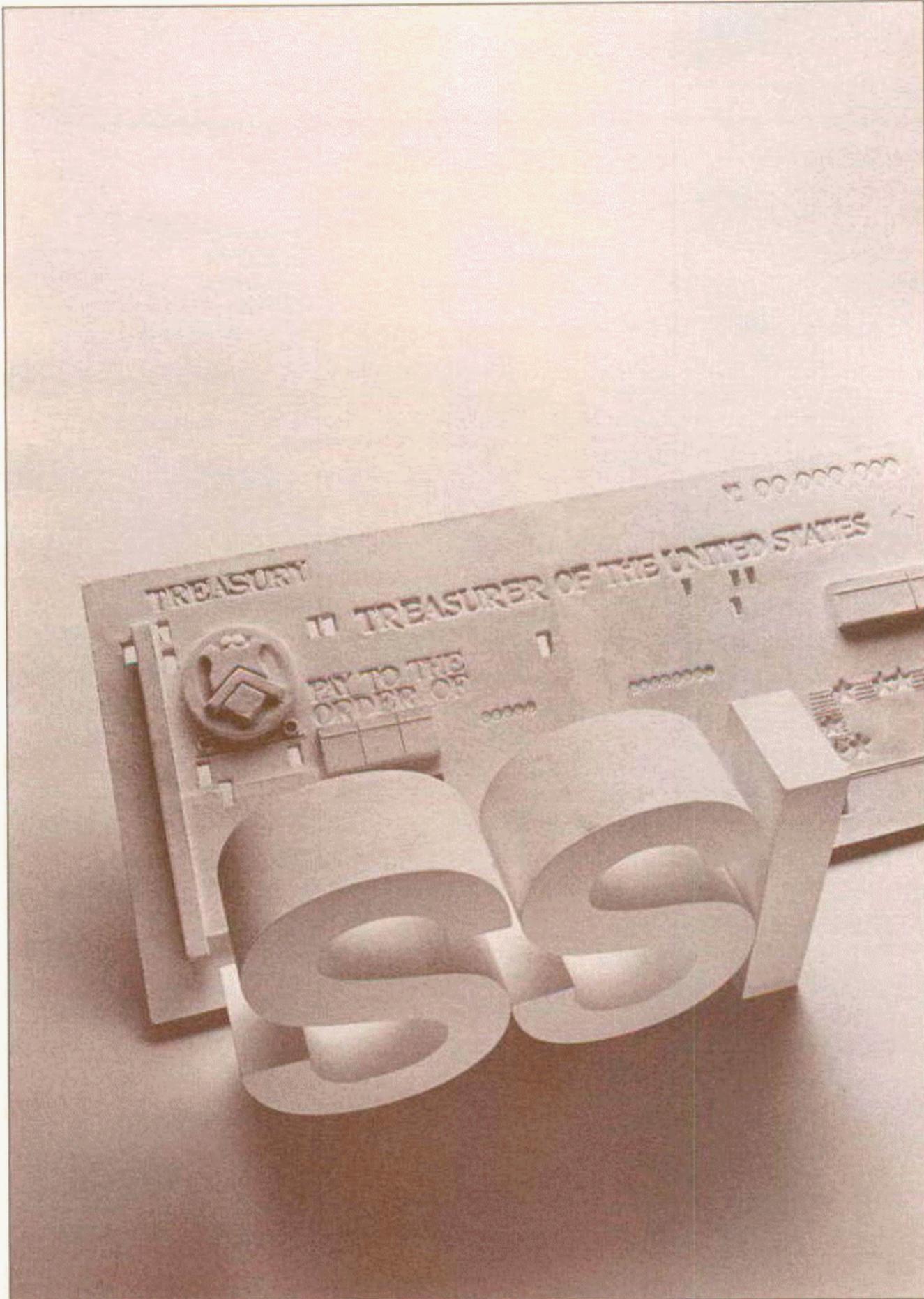


# Oasis

JANUARY 1994



The 20th anniversary  
of a landmark program

## Click on a Topic Below

### FEATURES

- 4 SSI marks 20 years
- 6 Getting SSI up and running
- 9 SSA community scholarship application accepted
- 10 Reengineering the agency
- 12 Houston's Northeast BO

### DEPARTMENTS

- 16 Debt management record set in Wisconsin DO
- 17 Program primer
- 19 TQI book review
- 21 Components implement TQI
- 18 Personnel matters
- 20 Inklings
- 22 Scanning Social Security
- 27 Retirees

### From the editor

Researching the articles for the 20th anniversary of SSI was very enlightening. A program circular from early 1974 stated, "Social Security offices always face heavy interviewing loads at the beginning of a week, at the beginning of a month, after a holiday, and at the first of the year. On this occasion, all coincided with the beginning of a new program, and a new program which started with issuance of checks to people with whom communication is often difficult.

"The largest crowds were in some metropolitan areas, notably New York City, Seattle, and San Francisco.

Emergency measures had to be put into effect in New York City, where in some offices the lines of people waiting to be interviewed stretched out onto the sidewalk. On January 9, 22 heated buses, with toilet facilities, were stationed at curbside outside the busiest offices. More than 200 additional interviewers were temporarily assigned to New York City offices from other locations."

Yet the central salient fact of that first week, in which more than three million SSI checks were mailed, is that approximately 98 percent of them were delivered promptly and in the right amount.

On the following seven pages, we review and recount some of the activities that made this achievement possible.

Also in this issue, are excerpts from an address by Dr. Michael Hammer, an authority on reengineering processes. That article is on page 10. And, in our continuing series of articles on urban offices helped by the Metropolitan Office Enhancement Project, is a profile of the Houston Northeast Branch Office on page 12.



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THE COMMISSIONER OF SOCIAL SECURITY

BALTIMORE, MARYLAND 21235

January 1, 1994

Dear SSA Coworkers:

An anniversary gives us time to remember: time to relive and celebrate joyous moments in our own lives; time to reflect on events that we shared as members of a larger community. Whatever the past event, happy or solemn, an anniversary gives us all the opportunity to consider an event's messages for us from the past and into the future.

We, here at SSA, have a special anniversary to commemorate. We invite you to join us in observing the 20th Anniversary of the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program.

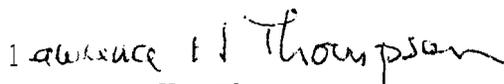
The first SSI benefits were paid in January 1974. Though we personally were not yet part of the SSA family, we can well imagine-- and have been told by many of you--what a hectic, exciting time that was with only 14 months between legislative enactment and the doors opening to the public. Staff throughout SSA performed a near miracle in getting those first checks in the mail. That commitment to a program that helps people so directly has continued through the years. With new challenges along the way and a population of people served that has nearly doubled since the beginning, the SSI program prepares to enter a third decade of service.

We should take pride in the help that we can give to people whose lives have challenged them with unimaginable difficulties. But also, we should look behind us for lessons learned over these 20 years. Hopefully, our experiences, our desire to serve, and our vision of new, and yet to be discovered, ways to meet the compelling needs of individuals that the SSI program was established to serve will carry us through the next decade we now enter together.

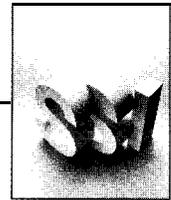
Happy Anniversary, SSI!

Sincerely,

  
**Shirley S. Chater**  
Commissioner  
of Social Security

  
Lawrence H. Thompson  
Principal Deputy Commissioner  
of Social Security

# SSI marks 20 years



*'The greatest challenge (SSA) has ever had'*

**T**wenty years ago, on January 2, 1974, the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program became a reality when the first rush of claimants under the new program entered our offices.

SSA had been given 14 months to prepare for SSI—and, according to reports from the field, we needed every minute.

When President Richard Nixon signed the SSI legislation on October 30, 1972, he called it “landmark legislation.” It provided for a new federal program that would improve the economic security of America’s needy aged, blind and disabled.

Many of the original SSI recipients had been on state assistance rolls before the federal program was established. The federal SSI program was designed to provide a nationally uniform income floor for people who have little or nothing on which to live. The program provides monthly payments to individuals age 65 or

older, those who are blind, and those who have disabilities—when they also have low income and limited resources.

## SSA’s greatest challenge

When President Nixon signed the SSI legislation into law, he

with all seriousness that to do so will take everything that we have.”

Why us?

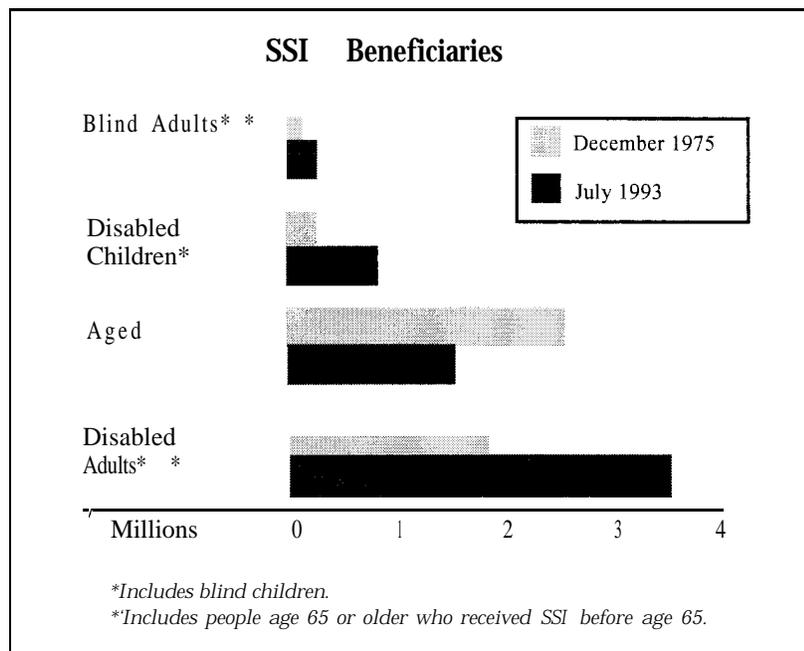
SSA was given the responsibility of administering the program because we had a nationwide network of field offices and a state-

of-the-art data processing and recordkeeping system.

Also, there was (and is) a considerable overlap between the clientele of the Social Security insurance programs and SSI. (In certain situations, individuals can receive benefits from both programs.)

Establishing a sense of the scope of the new program that the agency had to administer was difficult.

In 1973, SSA estimated that about 3.2 million state welfare recipients would be transferred to the federal rolls by January 1974. In addition, three million new claims would be taken from people made eligible by the new SSI program. Ten regional planning officers were ap-



also increased the responsibilities of SSA. Then-Commissioner Robert Ball noted, “We’re faced—beginning now—with the greatest challenge that this organization has ever had. And I face it with you with great confidence. I know that we’ll live up to the challenge, but I want to stress

pointed to work directly with state and county welfare agencies during this period to make ready for the changeover to a federalized assistance program.

A further complication was that before SSI went into effect on January 1, 1974, the legislation was amended twice-on July 9 and December 31. These amendments increased the amounts payable under the program, and then advanced the date the first increase would go into effect.

## Success nonetheless

By March 1974, ceremonies at headquarters were held in which Health, Education and Welfare Secretary Caspar Weinberger presented a Certificate of Appreciation to SSA employees "for excellent service to the people of the U.S. in the successful implementation of the SSI program."

In all states, SSA personnel had worked closely with state agency employees to see how the job could be best accomplished.

In a major effort at outreach, SSA and the Administration on Aging joined forces to conduct Project SSI-Alert. In the forefront were district managers throughout the country who worked closely with representatives of other government agencies and private voluntary organizations in a combined effort to inform potential beneficiaries of provisions of the SSI program.

As a result of these efforts, more than 500,000 people who had not been receiving public assistance payments previously filed claims for SSI benefits before the end of 1974.

## The ensuing years

There have been many SSI program changes over the past 20 years.

Many of the SSI program changes are reflected in the changing demographics of our SSI clients.

While SSI was designed to serve people of all ages, persons aged 65 and over initially comprised more than half of the caseload. Since then, the greatest growth has occurred among disabled recipients, whose number more than tripled since 1974 and



"This is the basic federal model. it also comes with state options."

who constituted 73 percent of those on the rolls in 1993.

These increases involve disabled persons of all ages, including children, who represent about 12 percent of recipients-up from 3 percent in December 1975.

## Technology

SSA has made use of rapidly evolving technology to simplify agency contact for everyone. While the framework of SSI benefits remains essentially as origi-

nally designed, program administration has been marked by significant change.

In the early days, claimants had to appear in person at field offices in order to complete paper applications. Now many applications can be completed by telephone, and a new computer-based system provides an automated process that is more accurate and efficient.

Claimants now have the option of using a national 800 number to schedule appointments or obtain information about their claims.

SSA still places a high priority on identifying low-income individuals who may be eligible for SSI payments and informing them about the program. One goal of SSA's outreach strategy is to reduce barriers that may deter people from program participation.

"This is an especially appropriate time to reflect on what the SSI program is and what it should be," said **Linda Davis Randle**, Acting Associate Commissioner for Supplemental Security Income. "As we embark on our third decade, we look back over 20 years of SSI history and also look forward to the future.

"Today, we're addressing major changes-larger caseloads and changes in the economy. SSA continues to evaluate whether the basic goals set for the 1972 legislation are still appropriate and how the program can best serve its clients into the 21st century How SSI performs its mission in the future will continue to be a concern for all of us." ♦

# Twentieth anniversary

*How SSA met the challenge*



**I**t was a formidable task, indeed. "The SSI program has proven more complex than originally anticipated," said Sumner Whittier, Director of the Bureau of Supplemental Security Income (BSSI), who was in charge of organizing SSA's resources to meet what others had called "our greatest challenge."

In 1972, in order to implement Social Security Act amendments mandating the new SSI program, the Office of Management and Budget permitted SSA to hire an additional 12000 permanent employees by June 30, 1973.

In 1973 alone, the Bureau of District Office Operations added some 250 field offices. Field offices set up special SSI units and headquarters "experts" in SSI program policy volunteered for details in the field.

Estimates indicated that there were then 800,000 people on the prior state programs' assistance rolls who had never applied for a Social Security number. So SSA would have to enumerate those individuals who had not been assigned an SSN, but who were eligible for benefits under the SSI program.

## **SSADARS, too**

Not only did SSA have to contend with administering a new, comprehensive program, but also with a new state-of-the-art communications system.



Employee mastering new SSADARS system.

It was clear from day one that SSI would necessitate dependable systems communications between the field offices and headquarters computer operations. The result was the Social Security Administration Data Acquisition and Response System (SSADARS). Although such a system would have been adopted eventually, it would not have happened as quickly without SSI.

During the first week of operation, SSADARS handled a total of 106,348 queries. The total jumped to 646,044 by the end of January, and it climbed to 1,258,942 by Feb. 19.

In the first month of operation, about 600 SSA employees were temporarily reassigned to offices with the heaviest SSI workloads.

They came from other DOs, the regional offices, the PSCs and headquarters. In February 1974, a request for volunteers was circulated throughout central office. As a result, close to 100 more employees were sent out on temporary assignments to the heavily impacted offices.

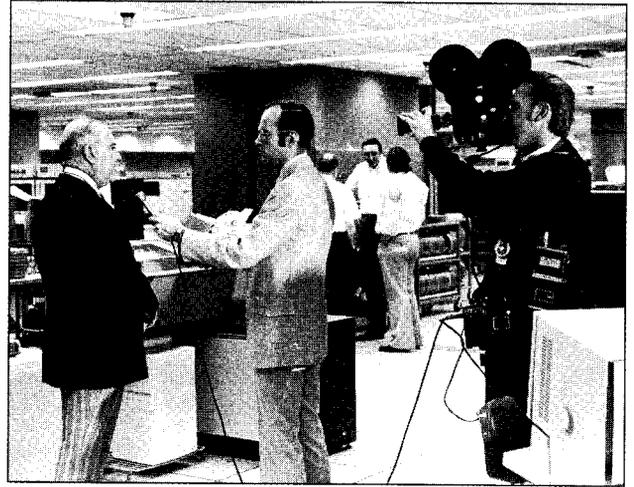
SSA budgeted for about 233,000 hours of overtime per week during 1974. Overtime hours decreased by almost half this amount by 1975.

Commissioner Bruce Cardwell admitted, "There were problems in the first month, but over 95 percent of the payments. . . were delivered promptly during the first few days of January."

## **Heavy business**

He went on to say that many Social Security offices across the country expected a heavy volume of business again in February. "It's still a brand new program," he cautioned. "People aren't familiar yet with eligibility rules or payment amounts."

By the end of the year, more than 500,000 people who had not been receiving public assistance



### Scenes from 1974

Left, San Francisco Regional Commissioner John Richardson (l.) examines first batch of SSI checks slated for West Coast delivery with Treasury Department official William Moffatt. Above, Bureau of Data Processing Director Bill Hanna is interviewed by Baltimore news media on agency preparations for SSI. Below, Jan. 2, the first day of SSI, witnessed a rush of claimants into SSA field offices, such as this one in Stockton, Calif. (Photo courtesy of Stockton Record.)



payments previously filed claims for SSI benefits.

With time and experience came increased efficiency. Between 1974 and 1979, the SSI payment error rates were cut in half.

## SSI today

By 1983, of 1,200 new claims reps, 58 percent specialized in the SSI program. New SSI claims rep trainees were required to complete a nine-week course and to study 2,000 pages of lessons.

Mort Aronson, Training Coordinator and Operations Officer at the Chicago (N.) DO in 1983, told OASIS that they had “. . . a tightly packed course for claims rep trainees” and that “on-the-job training is also very important. If we gave only classroom training during the course, it wouldn't work as well.”

At the end of fiscal 1993, SSI claims reps numbered 8,278, including 2,625 “generalists” who take both Social Security and SSI claims.

The 3.2 million people receiving assistance in 1974 has nearly doubled. There are now an estimated 6.2 million people receiving benefits. Figures from the 1993 *Social Security Bulletin* indicate that in December 1992, over 623,000 blind and disabled recipients classified as children were receiving SSI payments. These children make up almost 12 percent of SSI recipients.

An SSA initiative to modernize the SSI claims process is proceeding on schedule. The new system automates the paper application and claims development process with a computer-based one that is more accurate and efficient. Implementation of the new system began in March 1992. A second phase, which expanded the capabilities of the system, was implemented in March 1993.

## SSI outreach

As the SSI client base has grown, so have the needs. In 1994, recipients include growing numbers of non-English-speaking, homeless and mentally ill clients, as well as patients with HIV/AIDS. These new challenges impact on the field offices in ways that did not exist 20 years ago.

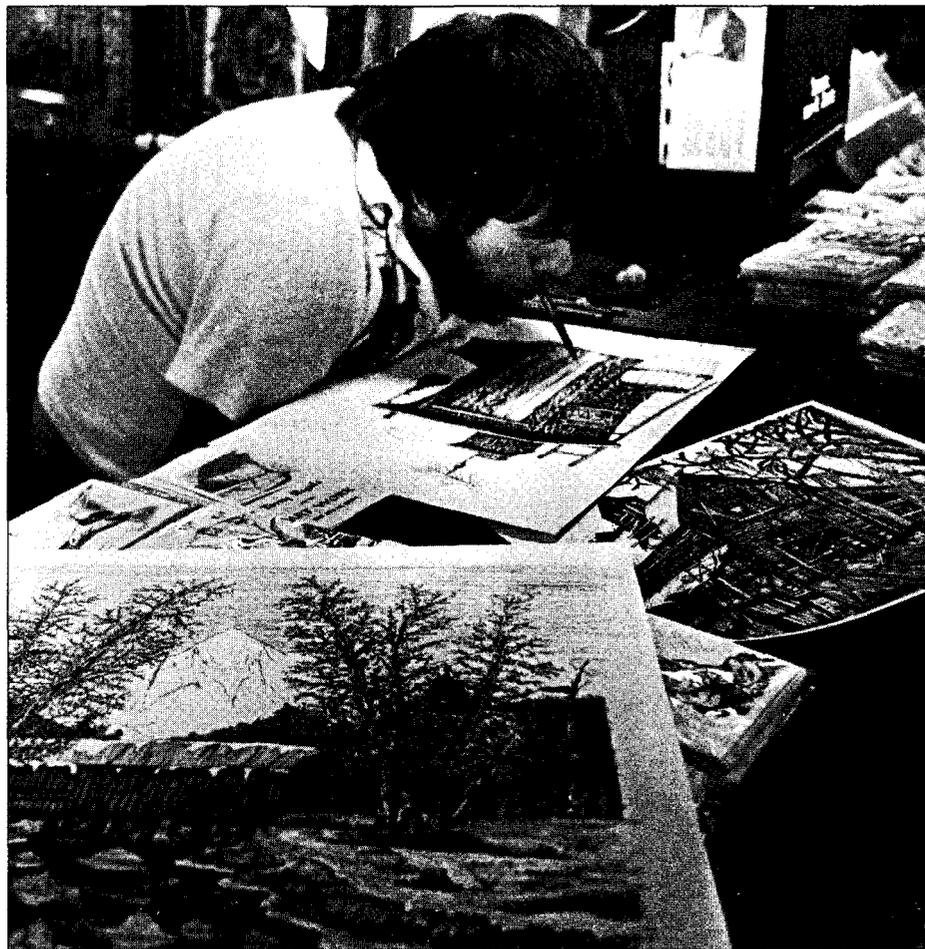
SSA is taking special measures to reach homeless populations by working directly with advocacy groups to disseminate information on the SSI program. Field reps take claims at homeless shelters, find rep payees and arrange for addresses to which benefit checks may be sent. Public service announcements on television and radio stations across the country advertise messages on SSI. There are now more than

1,100 coordinators in regional and field offices working on outreach to the homeless.

A special youth initiative involving SSA participation in a joint public and private sector Workgroup has been established



Above, instructor Bob Ann Peele returns corrected quizzes to 1983 class of SSI claims rep trainees. Below, SSI helped quadriplegic Tony Ryals while he worked to become an independent artist.



to address concerns of children with special health care needs. The group, comprised of representatives from SSA, the Health Care Financing Administration, HHS's Maternal and Child Health Bureau, Department of Education, state title V programs and advocacy groups, is working to improve children's access to SSI and to other available health and rehabilitation services.

**Linda Davis Randle**, Acting Associate Commissioner for SSI, told *OASIS*, "The history of the past 20 years shows us that the energy and innovation of our employees have enabled the agency to meet the challenges of a still-changing SSI program. I don't know what the future holds for the program, but I feel confident that our people will be able to adapt and perform at the same high level that we have in the past." ❖



SSI helps aged individuals, such as Annie Owens (above) and children, such as John Suarez (below with his mother Lupe).



# SSA scholarships

*1994 applications accepted through April*

**T**he SSA Community Scholarship Fund provides financial assistance to children of full-time SSA and Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA) employees. To qualify, children must:

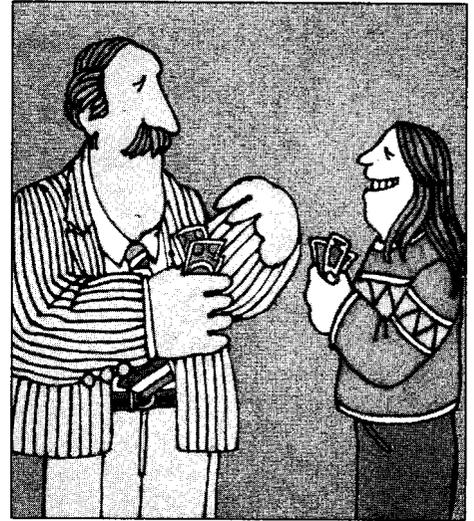
- be high school seniors or college students enrolled in an undergraduate program on a full-time basis;
- maintain a current grade-point average of at least 3.0;
- demonstrate financial need; and
- participate in volunteer community/civic/religious/social activities.

SSA community scholarships are awarded in three categories. They are:

- **Category A**-Each scholarship will be valued at \$1,000, and the money can be used at the student's school of choice.
- **Category B**-Award of a one-year, full-tuition scholarship to a local community college in Baltimore. (Application is restricted to students residing in the Baltimore metropolitan area.)

\***Category C**-Honorable mention scholarships, ranging from \$100 to \$300.

Applications can be picked up at any Employee Activities Association service center or can be requested by calling (410) 965-8537 after March 1. Applications will



Every dollar counts when financing higher education for your children. Money from the SSA Community Scholarship Fund can help.

be accepted during the month of April and must be mailed no later than April 30 to:

**SSA Community Scholarship Fund, Inc.**  
**6401 Security Blvd.**  
**Room 1-C-14 Operations Bldg.**  
**Baltimore, MD 21235**

Selections will be made by an independent selection committee and winners announced in June. ❖