

Olympic-Sized Rates Force Motel Residents to Area Park

By DIANA GRIEGO, *Times Staff Writer*

At least five homeless families spent the night Friday at Featherly Regional Park in Yorba Linda, sleeping in patched tents or cramped cars because they can no longer afford increasing motel rates in Orange County and have nowhere else to go.

The rates are going up in anticipation of soon-to-arrive Olympic visitors, forcing an increasing number of families who reside in the normally affordable motel rooms onto the streets, a county official said.

20 Families Expected

One counselor who works for a shelter that provides temporary housing to the homeless said shelter workers expect to have 20 families living at the park by Sunday.

The county Human Relations Commission, Community Development Commission and other county coalitions which aid the homeless developed a task force in 1983 to combat the anticipated problems that Olympic tourism would deal to "families just scraping by," said Rusty Kennedy, executive director of the Human Relations Commission.

Kennedy estimated the number of homeless in Orange County to be 4,000. "We expect that number to increase this month because of low-income families being forced out of residential motels," Kennedy said. "They won't be evicted. They're telling them, 'You've got to move because we're renovating.'"

The first family to arrive to spend the night in Featherly Park was Brad and Carol Ammons and their 18-month-old son, Bradley Jr. Wearing only his birthday suit, Bradley Jr. pounded a one-quart aluminum pan playfully against a tree stump, unaware that the park was to be his new home—at least for the next month.

"This isn't so bad," 26-year-old Brad Ammons told his son. "It's sort of like camping out."

The Ammonses are thankful for the campsite, after being forced out of the Anaheim Golden Horse motel because they couldn't afford the



\$12-a-week rate increase imposed last week. The increase boosted the weekly rate to \$152, or more than \$650 a month for one bedroom and a kitchenette.

A desk clerk at the Golden Horse said the motel is trying to attract tourists rather than permanent residents. She said some rate increases had been imposed on permanent residents only, in an attempt to discourage them from living there.

She said she did not know who imposed the increases and how it was decided who would get in-

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Forced out of their inexpensive motel by rising rates, Carol and Brad Ammons and son Bradley Jr. set up camp in Featherly Park.

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creases and who wouldn't.

"The motel is for people who want to stay for a couple of days," the clerk said. "It is not an apartment."

The Ammonses moved to the Golden Horse because rates at another motel, the Anaheim Village Inn, had risen to what they considered a prohibitive rate. About five weeks ago, the family could rent a motel room with one bedroom and a kitchenette at Anaheim Village Inn for about \$98 a week, they said. When The Times called to ask the motel's rates during the Olympics, a desk clerk quoted \$201.20 per week—or more than \$800 a month—for the same accommodations.

"Lately, it's been next-to-impossible to find anything under \$150 (per week)," Brad Ammons said. "I'll be glad when the Olympics are over and everybody goes home."

Although he is trained as a plumber, Ammons said he couldn't afford to put gas in his car to look for work. His wife, a diabetic, is undergoing laser treatments on her eyes. He says those medical expenses are eating up what little money he makes doing odd jobs.

"And on top of that, I'm 3½ months pregnant," said Carol Ammons, 24.

However, the Ammonses said they were "doing OK financially" until the motel rates began to rise.

"I think they (governmental officials) should've put a price limit on these motels during the Olympics . . . it isn't fair," Brad Ammons said. "The way it is now, they can charge as much as they want and raise it anytime they want."

The Featherly Park campsite had been donated to the Santa Ana-based Center for the Homeless, and in turn, counselors at the center gave the site to the Ammonses. Twelve sites, which go for about \$5 a day, have been donated by anonymous individuals, given specifically for families displaced by the Olympics, according to a spokeswoman for the center.

Although campers normally have a two-week limit imposed on their stay at the regional park, the Board of Supervisors approved a monthlong limit during the Olympics.

There are about 542 beds available in private, nonprofit shelters around the county, said Michael Elias, the director of Christian Temporary Housing in Santa Ana. However, the number of homeless always exceeds the number of beds, he said, forcing families like the Ammonses to sleep in parks and unoccupied buildings.

In a countywide mailing, the task force solicited extra bed space for the homeless from churches and synagogues.

When the responses were all in, 14 churches had offered 215 extra beds to those who become homeless because of motel and apartment price increases.

The Featherly Park campsites reserved by the county coalitions were supposed to be "just a precaution," Kennedy added, ". . . in case the Olympics situation got way out of hand."

"I guess the park sites became necessary before we anticipated," Kennedy said, after hearing that the first displaced families are already occupying the Featherly campsites.