

Dr. Janet O. Yardly, a family practitioner and the medical director of the Smith center, treats 1-year-old Daniel Tabrizi for an ear infection. His mother, Zilla, is from Guatemala, and his father, Mohsen, is from Iran.

For the multicultural clients of the Joseph M. Smith Community Health Center, the Allston clinic is a refuge with thorough, inexpensive medical treatment. For the staff, it is a place to practice enlightened health care.

BY MADELINE DREXLER

SAFE HAVEN

CAROL LANGFORD, A PEDIATRICIAN AT THE JOSEPH M. SMITH COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTER, OFTEN USES A SPECIAL diagnostic trick with her young patients. She asks them to draw crayon pictures of themselves. These drawings may reveal such medical problems as hyperactivity or concussion. They may also portray the child's inner world. One image particularly struck Langford: A picture by a 12-year-old Vietnamese girl showed her family in a boat, escaping their homeland. What the girl said she left out seems as crucial as what she put in: her vision of Buddha, leading the group to safety.

The health center, located since 1974 in a concrete housing project around the corner from Harvard's stadium, is the intersection of thousands of such journeys and dreams. "Everyone has their story," says Maria Elena Munoz, the family planning coordinator there.

Named for Joseph Maitland Smith, an ardent neighborhood advocate from Allston who died during the Kevin White administration, the clinic began as a typical public health outpost, serving the Irish and Italian enclave of Allston-Brighton. But as the neighborhood changed, so did the clinic's mission. By hiring bicultural and bilingual staff, it acquired a reputation among the city's 24 community health centers for understanding the problems, medical and otherwise, of recent immigrants and refugees. "It's probably the leading edge of health providers who recognize we must rapidly adapt to the needs of those populations," says Dr. Alonzo Plough, deputy commissioner of Boston's Department of Health and Hospitals.

Today, the facility draws scores of different ethnic groups surging into Boston. It is also a prism through which to view the changing face of the city. Over half of the clients carry no health insurance. A quarter or more are undocumented aliens. Sitting in the center's three waiting rooms on

Madeline Drexler writes the "Mind and Body" column for this magazine.

busy day - surrounded by ayon drawings, family anning and AIDS pamphlets in English and Spanish, and handwritten notices nouncing flu vaccinations (*Vacuna Contra la Gripe*) - patients from Guatemala, Salvador, Haiti, Ukraine, bet, Cambodia, or Ireland.

The staff is equally global. There's a Nigerian dentist, a Vietnamese dental assistant (as well as a Russian one), a Colombian caseworker and a social worker from the Dominican Republic. Cause nearly half of the clients are Hispanic, reflecting population trends in the Boston-Brighton area, all doctors on the mostly female medical team are fluent in Spanish. Other staff members are also largely Spanish-speaking.

And they, too, have their stories. Family-planning coordinator Munoz, for instance, arrived from El Salvador in 1976 "on the fourth of July. I remember it." Her first job in this country was stabbing frozen chickens onto a revolving set

of hooks. Later, she worked in an office at the Prudential Center, where she wasn't permitted to speak to the only other Hispanic worker on the floor. All immigrants, she says, "are in... I guess you could call it the same boat. It's hard. It's hard. I tell patients, if they need me, I'll be here for them."

For clients, the center is a safe haven, with thorough, inexpensive treatment and people who won't ask too many questions. For doctors and other staff, it is a place to practice enlightened health care, partly through direct service, partly through pulling bureaucratic strings on the outside to find the specialized care their clients wouldn't otherwise receive. It's no wonder the hallways often feel like an agora of personal drama.

IN 1987, A TEEN-AGER was working in her family's tortilla shop in Colombia when a machine exploded. Her chin, neck, upper torso, and arms were severely burned. A local doctor

arranged for her surgery at Boston's Shriners Burns Institute. But when the girl neglected follow-up therapy, her scar tissue contracted.

By the time she walked into the Smith center, earlier this year, she was partly disabled. She couldn't straighten her arms. She couldn't make a fist or comfortably hold a pencil. So misshapen had she become that her family disowned her, convinced she was cursed. Without insurance, a valid visa, or command of English, the woman was alone and suffering.

Nurse practitioner Janis Puibello saw her and headed for the phone. "I can't tell you how many calls I made," Puibello says. She implored Shriners to perform more surgery, but the institute replied that the woman, now in her early 20s, was too old to qualify for free care. She tried other institutions in Boston without success. Finally, she found a plastic surgeon at Boston City Hospital who would do the operation for free. Last month,

the first of several needed reconstructive surgeries took place. "This woman deserved a second chance," says Puibello, a lean, dark-eyed woman. "But the only way she was going to get a second chance was for someone to help her access the system."

Because the clinic serves a relatively young population, its most common medical efforts include treatment for viral or parasitic infections, advice on birth control, prenatal care, and childhood and adult vaccinations. Patients living under the federal poverty standards pay a nominal \$7 charge; those making more pay on a sliding scale. Even with these leniencies, doctors often make an impromptu decision not to charge for treatment. "People come to us as a last resort," says executive director Pamela Helms. "You don't want money to be a barrier." The center's low fees are underwritten by city, state, and federal grants and by the privately and government-insured patients who

use the facility.

Clients seem grateful for the arrangement. "Have good people here," says Marca Prata. Once a Seventh Day Adventist pastor in his native Brazil, Prata now is a house-cleaner in Framingham. "The doctor is good, is friend. Communication is good here. About the price - I look for insurance, but it's very expensive. Here, I pay according to my condition."

But when problems go beyond the expertise or wherewithal of doctors there, the Smith center becomes a bridge between its foreign-born clients and the behemoth medical bureaucracy. A staff member's worst nightmare is of having to deliver bad news to a patient, such as a cancer diagnosis, without being able to set up outside help.

Another fear is losing dependent patients because of purely bureaucratic constraints. Family practitioner Leora Fishman recently faced such a "system problem," as she called it. One of

YOUR HAIR IS OUR AFFAIR

Hair is an essential part of looks. We at Salon Lutz give the best personalized styling service around. That's why we've been the winner of *Boyz* magazine's "Best of Boston" for color, cut and styling.

Bring us into Salon Lutz and make an affair to remember!



Before

Salon Lutz specials

| | |
|--------------------|------|
| for Men & Women | \$28 |
| to Cut | \$50 |
| Perm (no cut) | \$75 |
| ats (Cap) | \$60 |
| ats (Poli) | \$75 |
| Consult. & Applic. | \$35 |
| Lint | \$12 |
| w Shape | \$7 |
| re | \$11 |
| | \$33 |
| Nails | \$45 |
| Wax | \$14 |
| g Wax | \$45 |
| g Wax | \$23 |

of Beauty \$100

e Over \$72

Certificates Available



... and after

Salon Lutz, 77 Newbury St., Boston,

CONTINUAL NEW ARRIVALS

'Tis the Season

FOR HOME REMODELING

Just in time for the Holidays!

Tile International Has Everything You Need for the Bath or Kitchen of Your Dreams!

- Extensive Tile Selection
- Granite and Marble Stone Fabrication
- Brand Name Kitchen and Bath Accessories and Fixtures
- Knowledgeable and Helpful Sales Staff
- Expert Tools & Materials

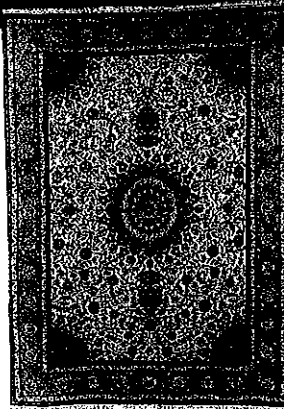


TILE INTERNATIONAL
New Worcester, MA Location:
589 Park Ave - Webster Sq. (Rt 9)
508-753-5300
Waltham, MA:

FABRICATION SHOP IN WALTHAM STOCK LIQUIDATION TO MAKE ROOM FOR NEW ARRIVALS

STORE FABRICATION SHOP IN WALTHAM STOCK LIQUIDATION TO MAKE ROOM FOR NEW ARRIVALS

Now, through December 31st!



Bring in any oriental rug, and we'll give you exactly what you paid for it, when you buy a genuine Gregorian Oriental Rug™.

You may now exchange any Oriental rug for the full purchase price.

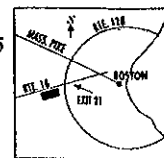
Bring in your rug, with proof that you purchased it prior to September 1, 1992.

All we ask, is that the rug has been properly maintained. That's all you need to receive full credit toward the retail price of a Genuine Gregorian Oriental Rug™.



Arthur T. Gregorian Inc
Oriental Rugs

Mon, Tue, Thur, Fri . 9-6
Sat. 9-5
Wed. 9-9
Sun. 12-5



Love's GIANT OF A SALE!

LUXURY FURNITURE WAREHOUSE - SHOWROOMS

SAVE \$200-\$970

SELECTION Over 127 different sofas, Country, Contemporary, Modern, Oriental and others. Boston's Largest!

GIANT SAVINGS Every sofa, every matching loveseat and every chair is sale priced. Even special orders in your choice of 160's of fabrics have similar savings.

GIANT WARRANTY Every sofa, loveseat and chair has either a 3 year, 10 year or lifetime warranty. Love's is famous for its excellent service. You must be pleased.



Contemporary **\$399**



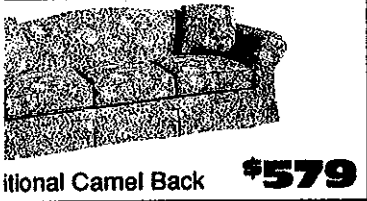
84" Charming Country Style **\$479**



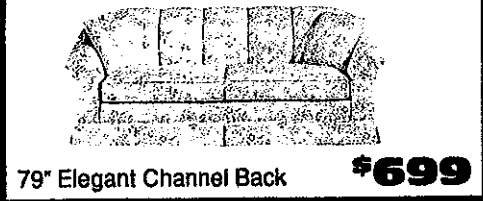
Comfy Marshmallow **\$449**



80" Timeless Queen Anne **\$479**



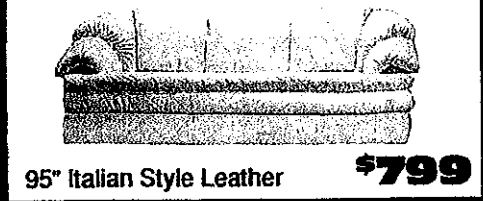
Traditional Camel Back **\$579**



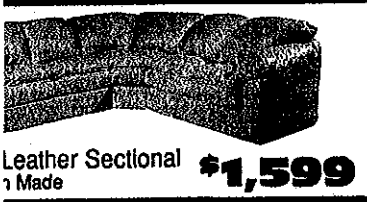
79" Elegant Channel Back **\$699**



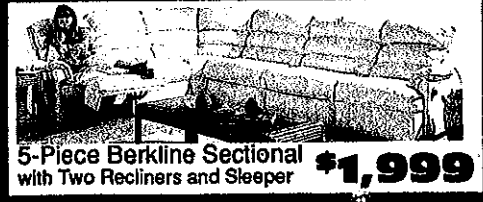
Line Pillow Back • With 2 Recliners **\$599**



95" Italian Style Leather **\$799**



Leather Sectional Made **\$1,599**



5-Piece Berkline Sectional with Two Recliners and Sleeper **\$1,999**



Glass Cocktail tables on casters for mobility **\$199**



Cherry Cocktail or End Tables **\$99**

426 MAIN ST., STONEHAM
 Rt. 28 at Stoneham Sq. (617) 438-9191 **NO PAYMENT STILL MARCH '93**

her patients, a shy Cambodian woman with nonactive tuberculosis, was no longer eligible for the center's care, because she had received coverage through her husband's insurance plan. But Fishman feared that under the new plan — one that even the most savvy locals find hard to negotiate — the woman would miss the close attention she needed to encourage her to continue her regimen. "It would take weeks for her to see someone, who wouldn't even know why she was coming in," she said.

Indeed, when asked how she felt about leaving the center, the Cambodian woman began to sob. "She's petrified," Fishman said later. "I told her, 'If you don't understand what someone is saying, just say: "I don't understand. Please say that again."'" In an empty hallway, at the end of the day, she added, "There are a lot of patients you want to hand-hold. That's why some people burn out in community health."

MANY OF THE STORIES the staff hears hinge on native traditions. When Cambodians are sick, for example, they scrape a coin over the painful area — over the forehead for headaches, the chest for colds, the stomach for stomachaches. The resulting red marks might alarm an unsuspecting doctor, but in such a situation, says Janis Puibello, "the last thing you want to do is put down someone's belief system."

This attitude of respect for cultural differences explains why staff members, even while administering standard antibiotics, may also encourage Tibetans to take their herbal remedies. It's why they won't argue if a Central American mother wraps a cloth around her baby's abdomen to prevent the infant's belly button from protruding when the child cries. And it informs pediatrician Carol Langford's decision to consult a Chinese acupuncturist when a 6-year-old Burmese girl, clutching a

of pain and tingling in her feet, cracking the knuckles in her toes to emphasize the point.

Like all the practitioners at the center, Langford listens as well as prescribes. For burn patients, she snips branches from an aloe plant in her office, because the potent sap from aloes is a common remedy in Central America. Langford tells mothers of colicky babies to boil dill in water, another effective treatment from the region. And she has become a staunch believer in cod liver oil — *aceite de bacalau* in Spanish, as Langford has written in big letters on the brown glass bottle — to prevent colds and ear infections in susceptible children.

Some of the strongest ethnic traditions center on the table. For nutritionist Carol Shlossman, the challenge is to educate immigrants, especially pregnant women, about healthy eating habits without disparaging their own culinary traditions. It's a humbling assignment. "Many of these women never had medical care in their countries; they had home births," she says. "So they don't know what a nutritionist is. They never had anyone ask them, 'What's the first thing you eat in the morning?'"

Shlossman's desk resembles a marketing display from the US Department of Agriculture, crowded with empty containers of cereal, low-fat yogurt and cottage cheese, and juices, all used to demonstrate nutritious American products. But she knows her cultural limits. "They really do miss the foods from home" — spicy Mexican tortillas, fried meat, native root vegetables. She tells clients to go slow, urging Hispanics who are at risk for heart disease, for instance, to roast their chicken instead of frying it. She praises fresh fruits and vegetables and warns against the canned spaghetti, bottled peanut butter, and other processed foods that tempt newcomers.

Sometimes, she just lets things slide: "A pregnant Mexican woman told me to

...y that she eats two to three
...w eggs with Pepsi every
...orning; in Mexico, she had
...with beer instead of
...epsi." Below the border,
...is decidedly un-American
...past is believed to make
...e baby stronger. Fingering
...e bow on her red silk
...louse, Shlossman says,
...without a trace of judgment,
...No white nutritionist will
...ive any influence on that."

The cultural disjunctions
...ten go beyond beer and
...eggs. Like most staff mem-
...bers here, social worker Jay
...ega sees the darker chasms
...etween the old life and the
...ew. If he can gain his cli-
...ents' trust, he may hear
...out immigrant children
...arning from their parents,
...mastery English as a way
...of gaining power. He com-
...forts young mothers crying
...in his office, with their tales
...of husbands or partners leav-
...ing them or going back
...home because of the dismal
...job market.

Domestic violence is
...common. Asked about it,
...ega resorts to the neutral
...jargon of his profession: "Of-



Lestie Brown, a physician's assistant, examines 16-month-old Franck Hubert Bilom. The boy's mother is from Haiti.

...ten, this behavior is quite ac-
...ceptable in their countries.
...And there's a value conflict
...when they come to this cul-
...ture." But in practice, he
...does everything he can to
...show frightened and bruised
...women that there's another

...way, that battered women's
...shelters and support groups
...exist, and that other women
...from similar backgrounds
...have escaped this fate.

For political refugees,
...the memories are grim.
...Years after emigrating,

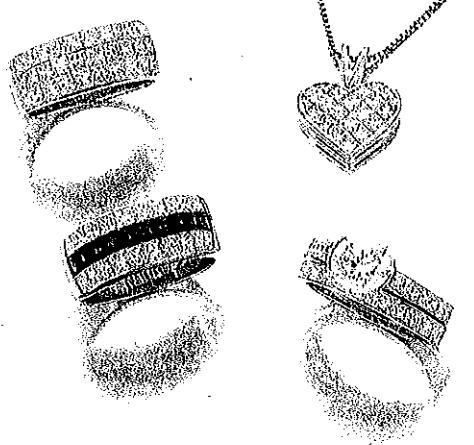
"Many still have the symp-
...toms of post-traumatic stress
...disorder," Vega says. "They
...have flashbacks of the atroc-
...ities, the murders. Wiping
...out an entire family before
...their eyes. The military and
...secret police. Yesterday I

...was doing an intake on a
...Cambodian family, with the
...Khmer Rouge and the tortu-
...re and the whole thing."

Such haunting memories
...can be expressed more easily
...when caregivers speak one's
...language and share the same

JADRILLION

...woman who insists on being genuine.



...the best in quality, the best in price.

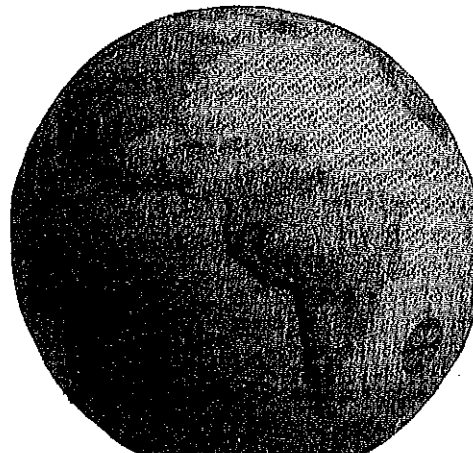
E S C E N Z A
D I A M O N D S

387 WASHINGTON ST., BOSTON, 617-542-7974
220 WORCESTER RD., RT. 9 FRAMINGHAM, 508-620-0090
MAIN ST. (HARRINGTON CORNER) WORCESTER, 508-791-0020

**FIND
TADZHIKISTAN.**

**The New Globes, Completely Updated.
15% Off On New England's
Largest Selection,
November 15th Until November 30th.**

Featuring globes by Replogle.



**The Globe
Corner
Bookstores**

Books & Maps for the Traveller

Downtown Boston:

One School Street

617-523-6658

Harvard Square:

49 Palmer Street

617-497-6277

Toll-Free Ordering:

periences. Marta Pulgarin, 30-year-old Colombian, says what her clients expect. For two years in the '80s, Pulgarin was an undocumented alien.

"You are afraid of everything," she says, in a voice so a listener must bend to hear her to hear. Pulgarin remembers toiling as a kitchen aide and a busgirl, working long hours for wages far below her co-workers'. She doesn't complain about the job, for fear of deportation.

As a caseworker at the center, Pulgarin can allay the fears of recent arrivals and direct them toward the benefits to which they're legally entitled. "I know the system," she says. "I explain to them what they can and cannot do." Among other things, she informs undocumented residents that they are entitled to free medical care and to public education. Another part of Pulgarin's job is to dispel the myths that keep immigrants living in fear: rumors that agents from the Immigration and

Naturalization Service lurk in subway stations, or that the government takes away babies born to women on welfare. Above all, she reminds clients that they must fight for their place in an indifferently different world. "They feel this city is a monster. The majority of them come from the countryside - they have only gone to third grade, fourth grade. It's hard to learn English, because they didn't know Spanish grammar. They don't want to fight for something different. They make progress, but it's very slow. It's little by little."

The promise of shared words, shared pain, and shared hope underlies the center's medical mission. Take Marcia Starikov, a dental assistant from Ukraine. For 17 years in the USSR she taught piano, while her husband acted in a repertory troupe. But as Jews, they felt threatened in the chaos of the Soviet Union's dissolution, when ethnic nationalism divided the country. Worse, they lived near the Chernobyl nu-

clear plant, where fallout from an explosion has produced high cancer rates in the surrounding cities.

Three years ago, they made their way to Boston. As Starikov says, "It changed everything." Now her husband drives a cab 17 hours a day, and she works in an unfamiliar field, practicing her English. Yet, like everyone here, the passion of her commitment seems to overcome the barrier of language.

"I think about why people came," Starikov says. "I try to make them comfortable. Maybe I understand [Hispanic] patients better than people who speak Spanish very well, because I was in the same situation." Perched on a stool in a vacant exam room, dressed in her blue uniform, she fingers a cord that holds dental napkins in place. She begins sentences only to cut them off, frustrated when she can't find the words. Finally, she leans forward and fixes an eye on her listener. "I very, very want to help." □

CABLE
Continued from Page 16

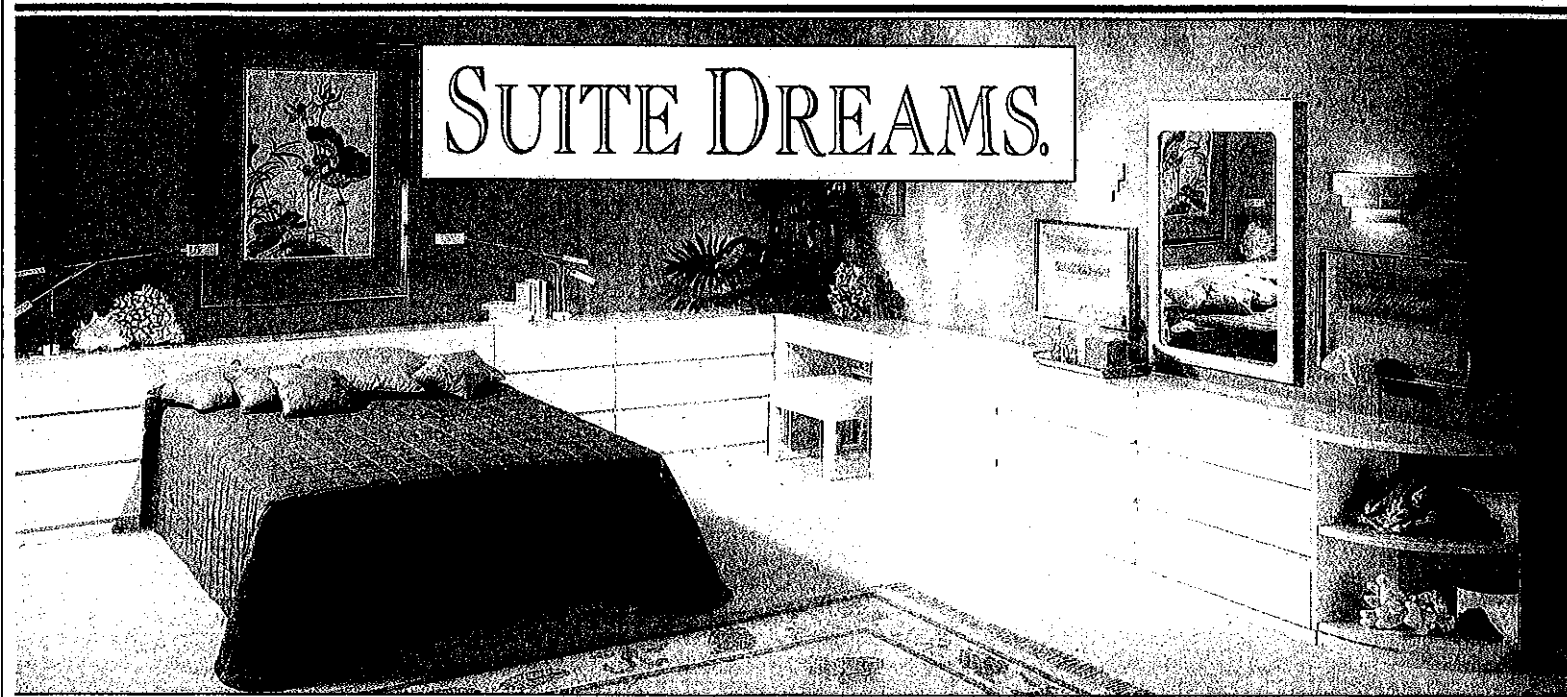
by five, six, eight different people.

And did you catch congressman Ron Dellums as the vote was announced? He was dancing - dancing on the floor! See, Ron and Ed were good friends with Mickey Leland, the congressman from Houston who died in a plane crash trying to call attention to an African famine. Ed hired Larry Irving from his staff, and Larry did the cable bill, and Ron helped him work the black caucus, and, well, it couldn't be sweeter, but it was.

Who to thank? Chris Shays, for one. Good guy, Republican, but Peace Corps. Fighting for consumers in the finest tradition of the Northeast wing of his party. Represents Greenwich, Bush's old hometown; brought some independent Republicans with him. And then, of course, Ed's chairman, the intimidating leader

of the Energy and Commerce Committee, John Dingell. "Mr. Dingell, I mean, if you don't put it in automatically, like *The New York Times*," says Ed, laughing nervously: "Ho ho" (gulp). And Dennis Eckart, who's leaving the House and going back to Ohio, after missing one too many Halloweens with his kid, and did a great job holding the broadcasters on board. And did you know why Eckart wanted to stick it to cable? They wouldn't let Channel 61 put Cleveland State basketball on the wire back home, and then they tried to drop C-Span for the Home Shopping Network.

That's what turned it around, really, stories like that. Ed became the cable ombudsman. He called it "cable therapy," out there on the floor. When they took the Yankees off free TV. When the converter didn't work. Or you called for installation, and it took so long you missed the first three rounds of the NCAAs. It happened to constituents,



SUITE DREAMS.

SAVE 40% OFF OUR WRAP-AROUND BEDROOM FROM LANE.®

Create a striking contemporary look with modular components in your choice of champagne (shown) or black lacquer finish at 40% off manufacturer's list price, this week only. So, if you've been dreaming of redecorating, visit us today. And open your eyes to selection and savings at Allen's.

Allen
FURNITURE

The most beautiful furniture store in America.

Needham Heights: Rte. 128 to exit 19A, right at the Ground Round, 1/4 mile on left. Open M-F 10-9, Sat. 10-5:30, Sun. 12-5. Allen's charge, MasterCard, VISA