

Mediation and reconciliation are aims of Justice Center

By Peggy Polacek

When disputes between neighbors, roommates, landlords and tenants, or consumers and local merchants cannot be resolved, Lincoln residents can turn to the Lincoln Neighborhood Justice Center, 3601 Calvert St., for free mediation and conciliation.

Since its opening in March, 50 cases — many involving landlord-tenant disputes — have been mediated at the center, Rebecca Winston, coordinator and attorney for the center said.

Mediation begins when the center is contacted by one of the disputants. After the initial contact, a mediator reaches the other party in the dispute to explain the problem.

Winston said this is often the first time the people involved understand that there actually is a problem. Once the problem is out in the open, a reasonable solution is attempted.

"This is a win-win situation," Winston said, "there's not anyone going away losing."

Winston said the center does not work on family disputes, criminal cases or cases involving money in excess of \$1,500.

There are 188 similar in the United States supported by the American Bar Association. The Lincoln center is headed by a 12-member board that oversees funds distribution and day-to-day operations of the center. The board

also can be called to review a case if disputants are dissatisfied with the results of the mediation.

Twelve volunteers also help with mediation. They are trained by the police and by Winston to ensure that they are well prepared to handle confidentiality and proper mediation in most situations.

Rita Monroe, chairwoman of the board, said the center receives its funding through grants. The Lincoln Foundation and the Cooper Foundation gave the center grants of \$2,500 each, she said.

When the center first opened, it was located at the Willard Community Center. It was moved to its present location in July.



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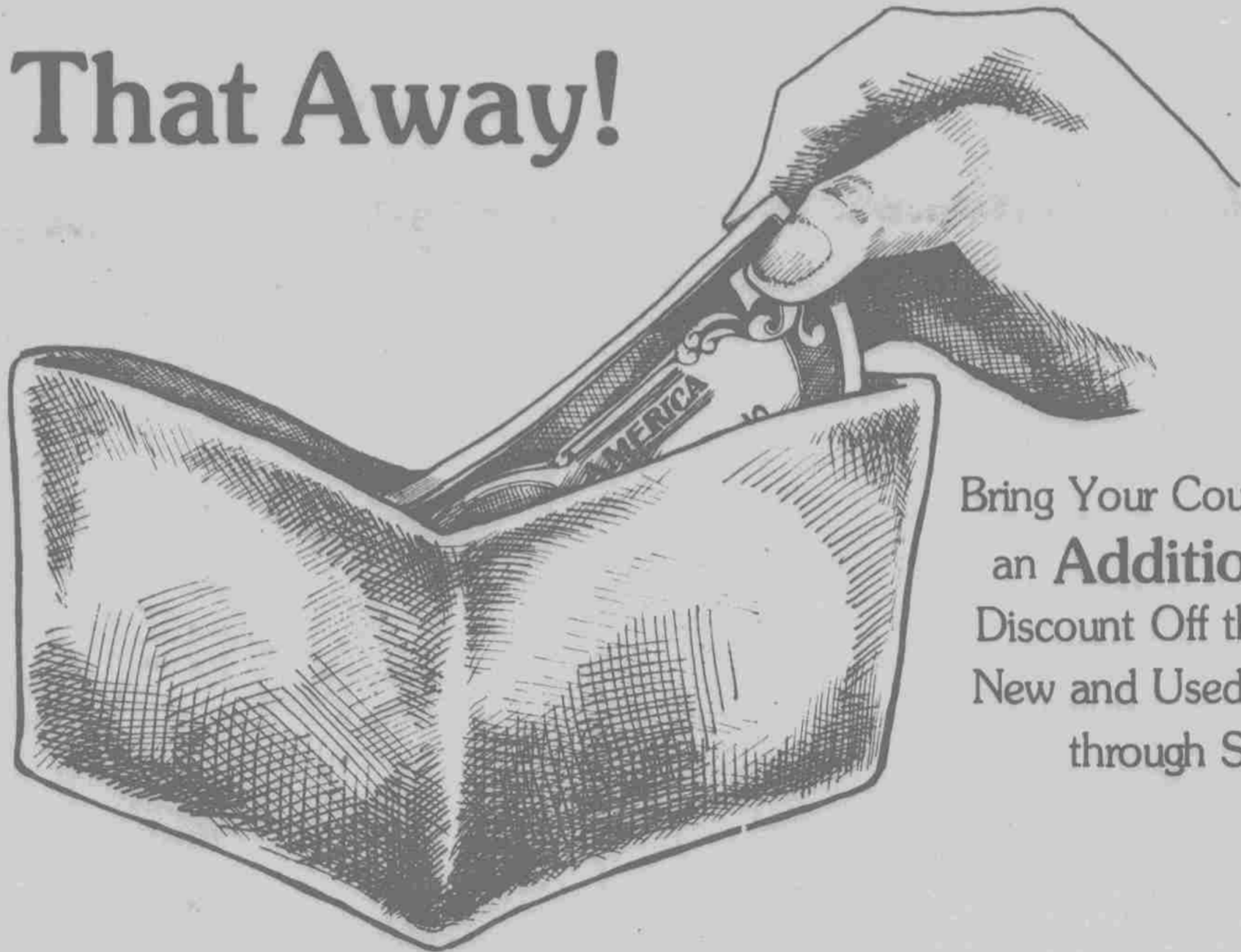
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