



A SKOKIE Park District T-shirt is worn by Mark Karol, a village resident home on leave from the Army. (Sun-Times Photo by Chuck Kirman)

# Skokie's image won't march away

By Bob Olmstead

The man wearing the Skokie T-shirt was stopped on the street in Honolulu. "Oh, we know where Skokie is," the native gushed. "There's going to be bloodshed there."

The 68,000 residents of the suburb just north of Chicago are discovering a problem long familiar to Chicagoans — the town is known worldwide, but not the way they'd like.

The thing that put the village — as it is officially classified — on the world news map is the continuing legal struggle of the neo-Nazis to hold a parade in the heavily Jewish suburb, and the determination of Skokie to prevent it.

In the process, the village fathers moan, Skokie is being caricatured in the headlines as a terror-stricken ghetto whose residents endlessly debate whether to ignore the Nazis if they show or descend on them like Joshua on Jericho.

**ONE OF THOSE** aware of Skokie's image problems is the Rev. Thomas O'Connor, pastor of St. Peter's United Church of Christ in Skokie, who says he regularly gets hand-writing letters from well-meaning members of the United Church of Christ in other

cities who ask: "What can we do to bring peace to Skokie?"

Mr. O'Connor is chairman of the "Skokie Spirit" steering committee, which is trying to set all this aright, with the help of a professional public relations firm.

Like Village President Albert J. Smith, who refers inquiring reporters to the PR firm, Mr. O'Connor wishes that news coverage of the Nazi-Skokie argument would just go away. For instance, he said last week, he wrote a letter of commendation to a TV station that didn't even mention Nazi leader Frank Collin's offer to forget the march in Skokie if the Chicago Park District would let the Nazis rally in Marquette Park, near the Nazis' Southwest Side headquarters.

From newsmen who do report about Skokie, Mr. O'Connor pleads for accuracy and balance.

For one thing, he notes, newsmen continually refer to Skokie as "predominantly Jewish" when it's not. A political poll less than two years ago showed Skokie is about one-third Jewish and two-thirds Christian, he said.

**MR. O'CONNOR** admits that the Jewish-Christian "sense of brotherhood in Skokie is somewhat fragile from time to time." Never-

theless, he points to an interfaith memorial service for martyrs of all faiths, held in Skokie April 16, when 3,000 Christians and Jews wore black armbands with the star of David to show "a mutuality of concern" for victims of the Holocaust.

The minister says that outsiders lose sight of the fact that many of the threats of violence against a Nazi march in Skokie have been made by persons who live in other cities.

If Skokie had a reputation of any kind around Chicago 10 years ago, it was that of a superserious community of do-gooders and civic organizations.

**AS A PLACE** to live, Skokie also boasts good commuter transportation into Chicago via the Skokie Swift, three high schools that traditionally turn out college scholarship winners, and a real estate tax rate kept reasonable by the presence of commercial taxpayers that include a steel firm and the national headquarters for pharmaceutical maker G. D. Searle.

But all the outside world believes about Skokie, says Mr. O'Connor, "is that it is a community of people who are angry, upset and divided. They ask us: 'Are people really lying in wait for the Nazis? Aren't you afraid to live there?'"