

Chapter Ten: Happy Hearts and Ash/Craft People



Happy Hearts and Ash/Craft wouldn't be possible without the children and adults working from the inside and outside to make them work, much like tending pumpkins in the facility garden with love and care to make them grow into their full and fun bright orange potential. Here are just a few of the many people who tended the Happy Hearts and Ash/Craft growing garden.

Maxine Asuma, Workshop Specialist



Holly Brown wrote a profile of Maxine Asuma, or “Mighty Mike, for the November 1987 issue of New Directions, the community newsletter for the Ashtabula County Board of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities.

“Mighty Mike,” as a coworker calls her, has a set routine to perform her job at Ash/Craft Industries. She sets up the job, assigns jobs to clients according to their individual skills, and performs practice runs with them. She supervises and constantly checks the progress of her clients as well as the finished product. And while she is efficiently doing the necessary things to make her job and clients successful, she adds caring and enthusiasm in large doses.

She loves her work group, describing them as fantastic. “It’s so different from being a foreman in a factory. These people are eager to work. It’s all I can do to keep up with them, they’re so good!” she said.

Originally from Nova Scotia, Maxine Asuma became a United States citizen shortly after she started working as a bus driver for Happy Hearts in 1971. After two years of bus driving, she resigned in 1973 because she believed that bus driving was not for her, but she returned as an instructor assistant in 1975 and worked in the Infant and Early Childhood Program at Happy Hearts. After some years at Happy Hearts, she insisted she would remain in the Ash/Craft Workshop, working with handicapped adults.

Max’s co-workers Linda Nicholas, Tom Harris, Linda Moroski, and Cassie Smith share “Max stories,” and agree that it would be difficult to find anyone who doesn’t like “Mighty Mike.” They appreciate her dry wit and praise her ability with her group. They described her as a good sport, who is teased constantly about her freckles, her short stature, her accent, her escapades, and her expressions such as “Case closed.”

Max confided that she could hardly wait until the children she had in the Infant Stimulation Program graduated through Happy Hearts into the Ash/Craft Workshop. "There will be such a difference! Infant Stimulation was a real godsend to them. Just wait and see the difference!"



Dorothy Bishop, Trail Blazing Happy Hearts Teacher

As Acting Director of Happy Hearts School in the absence of Wayne Reese, Dorothy Bishop accepts a gift from Vivian Spangler, outgoing associate chairman of the Ashtabula County Board of Realtors. Mrs. Bishop said that the check would be used for small items which are not covered in the school budget. She thanked the Associate Relators and remarked that it was thoughtful of groups to remember Happy Hearts School. Dorothy Bishop was one of the pioneer teachers at Happy Hearts School and as student enrollment increased so did the need for space. Happy Hearts opened its doors inv various locations, including the Austinburg Grade School building where Dorothy Bishop began a 22-year teaching career with Happy

Hearts. "I worked with the teenagers teaching them home skills. I loved them all and really enjoyed working with them."

Respond as in the Past

Editor, the Star Beacon

As a teacher in Happy Hearts School for the past 14 years I have watched the program for the retarded grow steadily in size and quality. Today, under the direction of the Ashtabula County Board of Mental Retardation, our comprehensive programs service 200 children and adults who enter our building everyday and reaches another 50 in their homes.

The people of our county have always responded favorably in the past to the needs of the retarded. I hope their faith in us will continue on May 7 and our request for .7 mill renewal and .7 additional will pass with flying colors.

Dorothy Bishop, Chestnut Drive

Dorothy Bishop Honored

Honored at a special dinner is Mrs. Vincent Bishop (seated right) Happy Hearts supervisor. With her are Wayne Reese (seated left), Russell Grippi (standing left), master of ceremonies and Vincent Bishop.



September 4, 1988. Vincent and Dorothy Bishop of Ashtabula will be honored on September 10, 1988, with a dinner at the Unionville Tavern. Their children Bonnie and James Nichols and Virginia and Philip Hagan, all of Chagrin Falls, will host the celebration. The couple also has two grandchildren.



Vincent Bishop and the former Dorothy McCullough were married September 10, 1938, in the Lindsay Crossman Church on Baldwin-Wallace college campus, with the late Reverend Louis C. Wright, then president of the college, officiating. They moved from Cleveland to Ashtabula in 1948. Vincent Bishop retired from the State Highway Department in 1978, and he was formerly associated with the Ford Motor Company. Mrs. Dorothy Bishop was a teacher at Happy Hearts School for 22 years, retiring in 1981. Both are members of Ashtabula First United Methodist Church.

The Next Classroom in a Successful Teaching Career and Life

Dorothy Elizabeth Bishop, age 97 years, died peacefully on Wednesday, July 6, 2011, at the Anna Maria Nursing Home in Aurora, Ohio. Dorothy's loving dedication to family and friends, her commitment to serving others, and the joy she found in life have been an inspiration to all who knew her. She will be dearly missed and remembered by all with great affection.

She was born in Cleveland, Ohio, on Dec. 26, 1913, the daughter of Wayland and Ludora (Purdon) McCullough. She graduated from West High in Cleveland in 1930 and from Baldwin Wallace College in Berea in 1934. Dorothy taught at Russell High School in Geauga County from 1934 to 1938, when she married Vincent Scott Bishop. They moved to Ashtabula, Ohio, with their daughters, Bonnie and Virginia in 1949, when Mr. Bishop became the Ford dealer in that city.

Dorothy taught at the Happy Hearts School, first in Austinburg and later in Kingsville, for twenty-two years, retiring in 1981. She was a member of the Ashtabula First United Methodist Church for over fifty years and was active in Ruth Circle. She was a former member and president of the Ashtabula branch of the American Association of University Women. She was a member of Women's Fortnightly for more than fifty years. She belonged to the Book Forum, the Sam Wharram Nature Club, Retired Teachers' Associations and Alpha Gamma Delta Sorority.

Dorothy served for twenty-seven years on the Ashtabula County Residential Board, which is involved in housing for challenged adults. She was a Red Cross volunteer for eighteen years. She took part in the Ohio Reads Program at Washington Elementary School in Ashtabula, working with students in the second and third grades. She enjoyed getting together with family and friends, gardening, sewing, volunteering and was an avid reader.

Jean Fields, Ashtabula County Board of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities Member

New Directions, Spring 1988

Jean Fields became a new member of the Ashtabula County Board of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities in 1988. She has been involved with the Happy Hearts program for 12 years as a member of ARC, Outreach, levy committees, festival communities and she has done a great deal of volunteer work in many areas of the program.

Jean and her husband Dave moved to Conneaut 34 years ago from Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania. They have eight children ranging in ages from 16 to 33 and being a parent of eight has taught Jean to prioritize and organize very effectively. She has a degree in Elementary Education and taught three years in Ambridge, Pa., where she received by circumstance and necessity on-the-job training in Special Education. Jean is currently active in her church, is a Trustee of the Conneaut Carnegie Library in charge of the used books program and is a founding member of the Conneaut Schools Academic Boosters. In her leisure time she enjoys reading and keeping scrapbooks for each of her children.

Jean sees her role as a Board Member as an extension of her active participation with and interest in the program. While she considers her knowledge of the Adult Program more limited than that of the school program, she feels confident that she recognizes the overall picture in terms of decision making.

Jean's introduction to the program was through a referral and subsequent visit by the School Nurse, Alyce Lange. Jean and Dave toured the school, were impressed by the atmosphere and had good feelings about their son Andy's enrollment in the program. Jean always says that while she's often had concerns about the educations of her other children, she's never been concerned with Andy's because she feels that he's received an excellent and individualized education at Happy Hearts

Jean would like to see increased communication between the community and our program to help promote awareness of the problems that the MR/DD kids and parents face and to help clear up some of the misunderstandings that surfaced during the past levy campaign. As Jean, in her quiet, yet very determined way, states with a great deal of conviction, "No civilization is any better than the way it treats its weak, disabled, and elderly. No community will grow without taking into consideration the needs of this population."

Marian Flickinger

New Directions, Fall 1995



During her career at Happy Hearts/Ash/Craft Marian Flickinger didn't call attention to herself and wouldn't allow an article about her until she retired in June.

According to the staff people who worked with her for years, Marian represented the professionalism and pride of her coworkers and for herself. She possessed a quiet dignity and respected the dignity of other people. She took pride in her work and in herself and a selfless desire to bring out the best in all of her co-workers. She loved children and they loved her.

Whenever there was a job needed to be done, Marian always said, "I'll do it." After she did it, she never mentioned to anyone that she had completed the task, but it just quietly got done.

Marian genuinely cares for other people and always was the first to appear when needed.

The article about Marian in New Directions said that "in Marian, our younger staff saw what pride and professionalism really mean in a world where it sometimes is hard to find, and they clearly appreciated it all. And those of us who have been around for awhile were constantly reminded of why we are here and what life is all about."

Celebrating 38 Years of Friendship: Inez Gaumer's Interfaith Class for

Retarded Citizens



Since 1969, the First Presbyterian Church on Park Avenue in Ashtabula has provided a unique ministry to the mentally retarded citizens of Ashtabula County

through the Interfaith Religion Class with St. John High School. Happy Hearts Orff Band students demonstrate their playing for the Interfaith Religion class instructors. From left, they are Julie Carr, Trevor Lundgren, Matt Newsome, Matt Evans, Nici Reynolds, Lisa Ray, Charles

Smith, Kevin Ecklund, Madelin Esquivel, Lori Petrochello, Benjamin Sullivan and Kristen Hague. March 31, 1990.

Inez Gaumer assists members of her Friendship Class in this February 2004 photograph. The Sunday School class for the mentally retarded community was started at First Presbyterian Church, Ashtabula, 38 years ago. The class was dropped last May and the church is holding a reception and celebration following the Sunday worship service, October 28, 2007. Carl E. Feather took this photo for the Ashtabula Star Beacon.



October 23, 2007.

In his story about Inez Gaumer retiring after 38 years of teaching her Interfaith Sunday School Friendship Class, Carl E. Feather noted “the

faithfulness of a woman and shared vision of those she recruited to help her reach an ignored segment of humanity, the mentally retarded.”

For more than 38 years, Inez Gaumer led the Friendship Sunday School Class at the First Presbyterian Church in Ashtabula, a class unique in age range (from 8 to 72) and students. Students came from Methodist, Episcopalian, Baptist, Roman Catholic and many other backgrounds.

Inez Gaumer - the teacher from the beginning of the class to its end – the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end- found the inspiration to start the class where she often did, from her son Claude. Claude, who has Down’s Syndrome, has always motivated Inez to dream, research, and act outside of the box. She recalls that 39 years ago she noticed the difference between the typical Sunday School class and eleven-year-old Claude’s ability to understand the content of the class. Inez tried to correct the situation by having Claude go to the same Sunday School class as his sister Judy, younger by 23 months. She recalled that if the teachers knew Claude he seemed to participate and learn the lessons, but if they didn’t know him he just sat there. “In those days the handicapped were not accepted like they are today. That was just the way it was.”

From the time doctors diagnosed Claude’s Down’s Syndrome at age six months, Inez and her husband Stanley worked tirelessly to make the lives of their son and other developmentally disabled people better. She volunteered at Happy Hearts School where Claude attended and she became an active member of the Association for Retarded Citizens of Ashtabula County as well

as serving the organization on the state and national levels. She served on the citizens advisory council of the Youngstown Development Center for 25 years. Every Saturday Inez, Wilma Spang, and John Abel help dozens of mentally handicapped people in the Happy Hearts/Ash/Craft Bowling League enjoy and improve their game. "I just wanted to get services for people with disabilities so they can do and partake in things everybody else does," Inez explains.

Stanley Gaumer accumulated an equally impressive list of activities for and with disabled children and adults. He has assisted with Special Olympics, served three terms on the Ash/craft Board and helped with the Boy Scouts troop at Happy Hearts. For seven years, he worked with Dick Flower to plan, fund, and build the Special Olympics Park on Green Road in Kingsville Township. Stanley also helped his wife Inez prepare for the Friendship Class every week.

Inez got the idea for the class when she attended a workshop at the ARC state convention. She thought that the need and potential for the class existed in Ashtabula County, and when she returned from the conventions, she went to work to turn her dream into reality. With the blessing and support of the First Presbyterian Church Pastor, the Reverend George Johnson, and his assistant, the Reverend Richard Baker, Inez worked to establish her class. She sent information to parents of Happy Hearts students, assuring them that both children and adults were welcome. "We got a very good response she said."

The Friendship Class began on February 19, 1969, with parents and group home personnel providing transportation for the students. The Friendship Class grew like a solid friendship and at its peak, 35 mentally challenged people attended Sunday School in three class rooms. For the first 11 years of the class, Dorothy Spark, Claude's physical therapy provider, helped Inez with the class.

Sister Jean Broda of Mt. Carmel Catholic Church also assisted Inez with the class which helped prepare several of its members for their first communion in the Catholic Church. In 1976, Sister Jean on behalf of St. John High School asked Inez a question that would lead to more years of teaching. Sister Jean wondered how their students could learn more about and assist the mentally retarded people. The Presbyterian advocate for the mentally retarded and the Catholic Nun collaborated. Inez taught a class in St. John's religious education seminar two days a week and students also volunteered in the Sunday School class. According to Inez, between five and ten students signed on every year. "These young people helped on Sunday morning and they received credit for the class."



St. John High School students Madein Esquivel (left) and Julie Carr assist Cathryn Prine, 3, on one of the physical education drills at Happy Hearts School. Madein and Cathryn participate in the Interfaith Religion Class for mentally

retarded/developmentally disabled citizens. Ashtabula Star Beacon photo by Carl E. Feather.

At the beginning of the school year, Inez asked students to write a letter detailing their thoughts and expectations about the retarded people they would be interacting with all year. The following May she gave them the same assignment. Comparing the contents of both letters showed the students growing in understanding in insight about mentally handicapped people, changing their attitudes and often their lives. Inez said that seven or eight of the students she taught at St. John's religious education seminar went into special education as a career and the class was a good experience for all of them because some of them had never had any contact with people with disabilities.

The members of the First Presbyterian Church also gained an understanding of mentally retarded people. At least once a year, Friendship Class members joined the congregation for the worship service. The annual Christmas production also exposed them to the work that went on in the class.



Inez Gaumer helps students John Pickett and Steve Hinkle find a Scripture. The class will be recognized on its 35th year during the worship 10:45 Sunday at First Presbyterian Church in Ashtabula. Ashtabula Star Beacon photo by Carl E. Feather.

Inez said she tried to always prepare a Bible lesson that presented a Christian lesson in an easily understood way. She recalled one student who turned her words about sharing into action. The man had a garden and raised tomatoes. He started taking them to Ash/Craft because he said that Mrs. Gaumer had told him to share so he brought his tomatoes to share with Ash/Craft.

Wise in the ways of students, Inez began teaching every class knowing all her preparation could disintegrate in the first five minutes. She said the class could be a challenge and she had to be ready to implement Plans A, B, C or all three of them. Class members collected offering, shared prayer needs and prayed for each other. Inez often had a craft activity ready for them. Recently, Leah Gray helped her with ink stamping crafts that the students enjoyed doing.

Music played an important part in the class, and parishioners Ann Christianson and Joann Fisher Meyer assisted Inez for many years. Local musician Gene Moroski worked with the class for years and contributed far beyond the weekly Sunday School program. “When he started helping us, he wrote an original play for every Christmas. They liked that because we had costumes and the scenery. We always enjoyed doing that.”

The class had existed about twenty years when Reverend Stephen Long became Pastor of the First Presbyterian Church and immediately embraced the ministry of the Friendship Class. Reverend Long identified with the ministry to mentally handicapped people because his older brother, Freddy, was mentally retarded as a result of oxygen deprivation during labor and birth. Reverend Long understood the joy, heartbreak, potential, and needs of mentally challenged people. He understood their uncomplicated faith, and the kind of sincere faith in action that Jesus taught and expected from the people who followed Him.

Reverend Long said that mentally handicapped people “are not inhibited in demonstrating their faith and living their faith. They believe in the power of prayer.”

Over the years, Reverend Long became friend and spiritual mentor to the students in Inez Gaumer’s class. He prayed for them and their family members, celebrated their joys and comforted them in their sorrows. Reverend Long recalled the bravery of class member Randy

Hershey in battling incurable cancer. He maintained a positive attitude and a smile through the pain and deterioration of his body. He can't forget people like Randy Hershey. "I have been so blessed over the years because of being with and knowing so many special people for almost 60 years," he said.

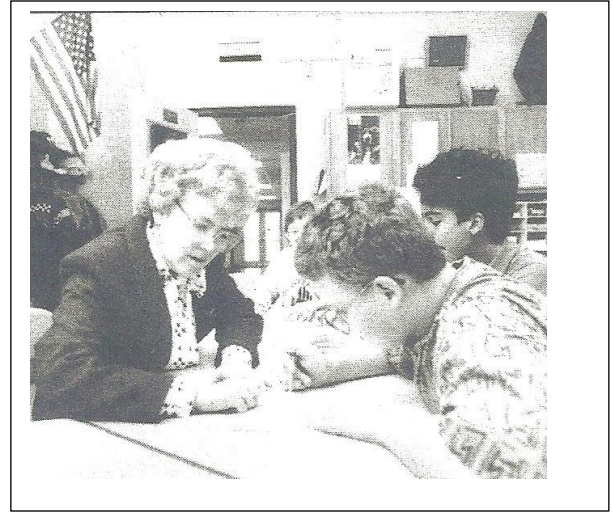
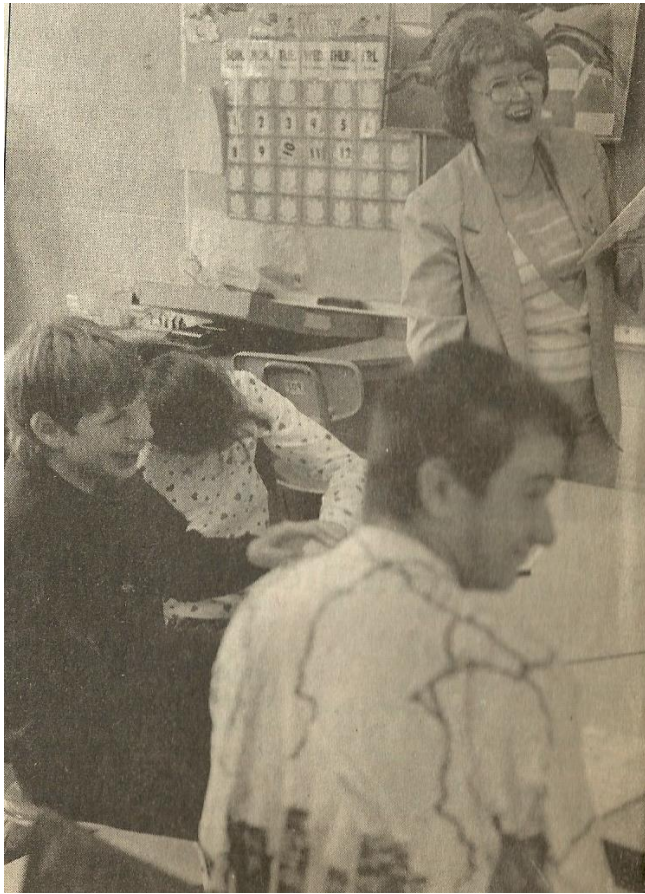
Time flowed on, church administrations changed, and other factors ended the class collaboration and reduced the number of students in Inez's Friendship class. After the class met for the last time in May, 2007, Inez decided to retire and dismiss the class with 20 students still enrolled. "I just felt that I'd done this long enough," she said.

Reverend Long vows that the First Presbyterian Church will continue to support the mentally retarded community. He said that the church has a strong commitment to the people with mental disabilities. Inez is not retiring from helping mentally retarded people either. Her current project is raising money to build a new playground at Happy Hearts School to replace the current one that has only two sets of swings. The cost of the new playground is \$125,000 to cover site preparation and purchase equipment designed for handicapped users.

Inez hopes that the celebration Sunday will be a reunion of people who helped with and learned from the Friendship Class. During the celebration which starts immediately after the Sunday worship service, the Friendship Class is displaying photographs and memorabilia of its history and Inez will share stories about the lives she touched and those that touched her life. "I had one student who would come up and kiss me on the cheek and say, 'Gaumer, I love you. He never called me Mrs. Gaumer. It was always, 'Gaumer, I love you.'"

She adds a fitting benediction for her class. "It was very rewarding. You get out of it much more than you give."

Betty Hartley- Teaching and Persevering with Happy Hearts



Ashtabula Star Beacon photos by Carl Feather.

Betty Hartley was determined not to be a teacher!

A story about Happy Hearts teacher Betty Hartley, appeared in the Winter 1993 issue

of New Directions, the community newsletter of the Ashtabula County Board of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities. The story said that Betty Hartley's colleagues described her as "determined." She is determined to acquire all of the resources an individual student needs. She is determined to provide the best help she can for family members. She is determined to be the most faithful and generous friend a person can have. She is determined to make every day the most beneficial and enjoyable for herself and the people around her.

The determination of Betty Hartley began with her growing up years in Ashtabula as an only child. She spent much of her youth babysitting cousins and children of neighbors and friends, at one point even caring for a handicapped cousin. She vividly remembered an aunt that doctors told that she had only six months to live and not much beyond that. At the sixth month, her aunt wanted to send the doctor an anniversary card. Betty admired her aunt's attitude.

These experiences with family and children helped Betty develop a love of children, coupled with a determination that the child care philosophy that her parents had instilled in her worked and were the principles that she would use throughout her life. Betty balanced her love of children with a belief that they must respect the authority of parents and teachers. Although she didn't yet know it, she would also use these principles in future classrooms.

Although Betty had always enjoyed working with children, she focused her education and first job on social work, not education. Graduating from Mt. Union College in 1957 with an emphasis

on psychology and a degree in sociology, Betty took a job in Illinois as house mother at Methodist Children's home. For six years she worked with troubled children who were headed for reform school, and then she decided she needed a change in employment and location.

Returning to Ashtabula to visit her parents and decide where to apply for her next position, Betty brought her determination with her. Florida had seemed like a place for her to job hunt, but on a whim (even determined people have whims!) she went to the Friendly Employment Agency in Ashtabula. The people at Friendly Employment told Betty that the Happy Hearts School for Retarded Children in Kingsville needed a teacher.

Her determination immediately asserted itself and Betty told the Friendly Employment counselors that her training was in sociology and psychology, not education. She firmly told them that she didn't want to be a teacher. The Friendly Employment counselors met determination with determination. "We've scheduled you for an interview at Happy Hearts," they told Betty.

"I don't want to be a teacher," Betty told Happy Hearts principal G. Thomas Graf.

Principal Graf sent Betty home with an application, and he called her two weeks later to ask why she hadn't returned it. When he offered Betty the job, she asked him if she were the only one who applied for it. He told her there were three applicants, but he wanted her. She asked him why he choose her and he said the magic words. "You have a love of children and a desire to work with children, and that makes you the most qualified candidate. I have other candidates, but you're the one I want."

HAPPY HEARTS SCHOOL
2036 East Prospect Road
Ashtabula, Ohio

Dear Parents:

Parent-Teacher conferences supplement progress reports and tend to enhance the consistency of the child's training. It is important that parents of retarded children possess a basic understanding of their child's capabilities and potentialities and the methods and procedures utilized by the teacher in exploiting them. With this information the parents can reinforce the school training in the home.

Realizing the value of such a conference, two parent-teacher conferences will be required each year during the months of November and March. Your appointment is scheduled for Thursday
Nov. 19 at 2:30 with Betty Hartley

G. Thomas Graf
G. Thomas Graf, Director

Cut (Return this section)

Wavering in her determination not to be a teacher, Betty accepted Principal Graf's offer, and he hired her as a primary teacher for the 1964-1965 school year. At this time, Happy Hearts School had 48 students, a staff of four teachers, two assistants, and four bus drivers and classes were held in the basement of the Ashtabula County Children's Home. Betty still wasn't completely convinced that teaching suited her.

In 1994, the year she retired on June 14, Ashtabula Star Beacon Life Styles editor Carl E. Feather, wrote a story about Betty and her teaching career at Happy Hearts that he titled, "The Job Betty Didn't Want." After she reluctantly accepted the teaching job at Happy Hearts, Betty quickly discovered how much she wanted it. She said her attitude toward the job changed when she met Ted Hattery who eventually became a client at Ash/Craft Industries. She recalled that Ted came in for testing before school started and after she met him she realized that he and his fellow students were children with problems and special needs, but children. "He allayed any fears I had" she said.

In a complete about face, Betty turned her determination not to be a teacher into determination to be the very best teacher she could be. Losing 14 pounds in the first month of her job, she gained her teaching philosophy and a love for her job. Her philosophy: "You take children where they are when you get them and you stimulate them, challenge them, and try to figure out how to get them as far as they go. The staff are all like that. I would stack this staff up with any staff anywhere. Those who are here now and those who have left are all wonderful and talented." Her love affair with her job lasted for the next thirty years. "I took the job and fell in love with it," Betty said. "I went back to college at Syracuse University for three summers so I could keep it."

Building the foundation of her teaching career, Betty combined her love of children with her equally powerful belief that children should respect the authority of their parents and teachers. Her approach included laying a foundation of rules and respect for the teacher at the start of the school year. Her students quickly learned that when she said something, she meant it. "I remember Mr. Graf telling me, 'Betty, I hear you in the classroom saying, Good job, Mary Jo, you're such a good girl. SIT DOWN MARK!'" she laughed.

According to Betty, she always told substitutes to start out firm with the children, but once they establish their authority they can ease up on them a little. She added that students have to know they can't get away with things. "They may be handicapped, but they are all children, nevertheless, and they will test you to the limit." Her students also discover that Betty has a soft spot for them. "I may come down on them like a thunderstorm, but through it they know I care for them," she said.

Betty's hard work to establish a disciplined class paid long term dividends. She recalled one of the proudest incidents in her teaching career occurred the day she took her class on a field trip to an Erie television station. In preparation for the trip, Betty told her students bad manners had to be left at home. She told them if anyone had problems with their manners, she would take the culprit by the hand, and lead them out to sit on the bus. The warning worked. The students behaved themselves in the studio and they were model guests in the restaurant where they ate lunch.

From 1964 until the 1985-1986 school year, Betty taught in the primary section and then she transferred to the Intermediate Class. Throughout her career, she returned to school to maintain her certification and keep up with the changes in the special education field. When G. Thomas

Graf, the principal who had hired her accepted a job in Atlanta, she considered going to Atlanta as well, but decided she had to stay around to see the new Happy Hearts School building which was dedicated in November 1968.

Throughout her teaching career Betty has learned adjust her teaching methods to the particular needs of her students, including taking advantage of field trips to teach language, math, and consumer skills. Taking her students on field trips to places like restaurants and museums gives them practical experience in socializing and navigating their way through the often-confusing rules for public and private behavior. She also uses the obituary pages of the newspaper, spending 45 minutes everyday going through the paper with the students. They always stop at the obituary pages to read the names and ages of the deceased and gauge the length of the obituaries. "I tell them that the obituary is a very important because every person is valuable, no matter what they did in life. They are still valuable because they were a person."



Ten children of the Primary B class of Happy Hearts School were given a special treat Wednesday consisting of a tour and free lunch at McDonald's Drive in Restaurant. Class teacher Betty Hartley assists one of the children on the tour.

All of her teaching methods tie in to what Betty hopes her students will learn in her classroom. She realizes that many of them will never be able to read or understand math, but she strives to ensure that each student will leave with basic survival skills and appreciation for their gifts and the gifts of others. "I want them to be the best they can be. I want them to achieve to the highest of their potential."

Looking back to her first day on the job, Betty marvels how quickly the thirty years that at the time seemed to be a vast ocean of time have passed. As she stepped over the threshold of retirement, she wondered where the years had gone. The answer is they have gone to her students everyone, the more than 150 students her teaching has touched and the hundreds of things she learned in the Happy Hearts classrooms. "I can't think of any job that would be more meaningful for me. I feel that I have gained as much from the parents, students, and colleagues as I gave to them. It's amazing what you can learn if you listen."

Betty hasn't become any less determined. She said, "I learned about life, about not complaining about little things. God said I was going to do this job, but I dug in my heels and said 'I won't. Here I am.'"

These days, Betty has applied her determination to navigating her way through a debilitating nerve disease that has her confined to a nursing home. She endures her physical problems with grace, elegance, and determination to overcome obstacles, the same way she has taught her pupils and conducted her life.

Aili Hokkanen, Happy Hearts Art Teacher



Born in Wakefield, Michigan, on March 29, 2014, Aili Hokkanen was the only child of John and Maria Hokkanen. The Hokkanen's moved to Ashtabula when Aili was a small child and they soon became active in Bethany Lutheran Church. When Aili grew older, she became a member of the Bethany Women and sang in the choir for many years.

After graduating from Harbor High School in 1932, Aili went to Cosmetology School, earned a beauty license, and opened a beauty shop in her home. She enjoyed working in the salon, but she decided to take college classes to earn a BA degree in Education.

In 1967, she became the art teacher at Happy Hearts School, a position that complimented her love of children and her zeal to help them learn art skills. Her colleagues and Happy Hearts parents said that she could teach

her pupils to make crafts from scraps of almost any material. In 1974, Aili took on the task of teaching an adult class at Ash/Craft workshop and she retired from that position in 1979. During the years she taught art, she earned her Bachelor's Degree in Art from Lake Erie College in 1976. Her paintings, especially scenes from the Ashtabula area, are exquisite.

Aili's hobbies included animals, painting, and people. She liked people and people in turn were charmed by her warm, kind, and giving personality. She especially loved cats and always fed those fortunate enough to meow at her door.

She died on December 6, 2006, at age 92.

Alyce Lange, Happy Hearts Nurse



*Happy
Hearts
students
Mindy
Lewis, 7, of
Dorset and
Martin
Smith, 4, of
Ashtabula,
share a
smile with
Alyce
Lange who
is retiring
from her
position as
a school*

nurse. Lange retired last week after 20 years of service to Happy Hearts School, during which time she was instrumental in developing the health services department. Ashtabula Star Beacon photo by Warren Dillaway.

An article in the spring 1988 issue of New Directions, the monthly newsletter of the Ashtabula County Board of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities announced the retirement of School Nurse Alyce Lange on March 31, 1988. An integral part of the program for nearly 20 years, Alyce Lange symbolizes the growth of the Happy Hearts and Ash/Craft program and the exceptional caring that contributed to its foundations and growth.

A native of Oil City, Pennsylvania, born into a close and loving family, Alyce knew at an early age that she wanted to be a nurse. When she was five, Alyce's father died and her mother somehow managed to keep her family of three girls and two boys together. She struggled through much adversity, but managed to feed her children and provide loving support in their growing up years.

Her mother's loving support helped Alyce realize her dream of becoming a nurse. Alyce began her nurse's training in Oil City and Chicago, and then she went to Rock Island, Illinois to earn her B.S. in Nursing. Next, she went to Trumbull Memorial Hospital in Warren, where she taught for eight years.

While she was teaching one quarter at the Kent State Ashtabula Branch, Alyce took her students on a field trip to Happy Hearts School, then located in the basement of the old Ashtabula County Children's Home. There she met Superintendent Wayne Reese and Happy Hearts students, marking a new chapter in her life. Alyce had lunch with Superintendent Reese who told her that he was looking for a nurse for the summer. When Alyce told him she was interested in the job, Superintendent Reese jumped up from the table and ran to get application forms. She filled them out, and growing more excited about the job, she dressed and drove several miles to mail the application. In June 1968, Superintendent Reese hired Alyce to be the summer nurse and by August 1968 she was a full-time employee traveling to family homes to evaluate children as well as helping Happy Hearts move to its new location in Kingsville.

Nurse Alyce Lange developed the health services department at Happy Hearts and served as school nurse for the past 13 years. She quickly points out that the Health Services Program also involves promotion of the School's educational goals.

She reports that she saw the health services program grow from 96 children and adults in the combined Happy Hearts and Ash/Craft program to 130 Happy Hearts students and 230 Ash/Craft clients in 1988. "I feel the health services program is a very important part of the program. I can recall many incidents where I was able to observe behavior and notice that it might relate to some sort of health problem," she said. One time she noticed the symptoms of a severe thyroid imbalance with weight fluctuations and frequent crying spells. She said the school was able to avoid a severe thyroid crisis on several occasions by being alert.

Many of the students are at a greater health risk than "normal" students because of multiple conditions and high susceptibility to heart and respiratory ailments that may lead to shorter life spans. "It puts you on edge. Every time I got called, I prayed that I would know what to do for the child," Miss Lange said.

Through the years Nurse Lange's life became interwoven with Happy Hearts School. She worked daily to address the problems of children, parents, and staff, being gentle or firm or both as the situation required. Her gentle manner could become ferociously protective if "that's what was required to help a child!"

Miss Lange shared the happy times as part of helping in the growth and development of the children and parents. She stood as a solid rock during the sad times when a child died and she had to put her own feelings aside to be strong for the parents. She stood as a trusted friend for the staff, always willing to listen to problems, to tickle their senses of humor on gloomy days, and to share caring and concern. "There were good times and bad times, happy and sad times – they usually balanced out. One can't let one's own feelings enter in because we must help the parents. When you lose a student it's hard to take, but you know the parent is really hurting."

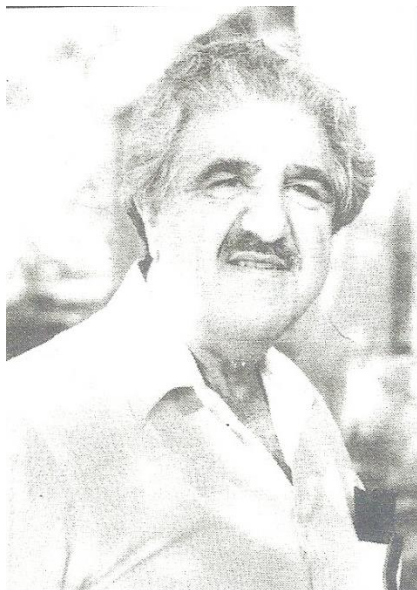
Alyce who has had more than her share of physical difficulties to overcome in recent years, has concentrated her efforts on the children and their parents. She says, “Through the years I’ve learned how these children can love, without hiding under a mask of indifference. They give so freely of life that it just flows.”

After she retires, Alyce said she plans to continue her involvement with Happy Hearts and continue with her hobbies of reading, traveling, church activities, gardening, crocheting, needlework, embroidery, sewing, painting by the number and Braille. She has been Braille for the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod, transcribing Sunday School lessons on an ongoing basis for the past 12 years. She plans to submit a Braille manuscript to the Library of Congress to earn her certificate. She also plans to spend more time with her family.

Alyce Lange says that during her twenty years of working at the school “my faith gave me the strength for my work and my work strengthened my faith. I thank the Lord for my privilege of touching the lives of God’s special children and for the opportunity to make a difference at a significant time in someone’s life.”

Tony Masters: The Details Make the Difference

(From a story in New Directions, Fall, 1993)



When Happy Hearts and Ash/Craft people wanted to describe something absolutely, spotlessly, clean, they say that it is “a Tony Master’s floor.” Tony’s dedication to detail and perfection is easy to detect in his conversation and actions. A three-dollar General Electric watt-miser fluorescent bulb costs more than the one-dollar fluorescent in the catalogue, but he uses them and can show you how he’s saving you money. He uses his chart of each classroom to demonstrate how many bulbs were changed in that room since the 1980s. “This room has needed only three

new bulbs in over ten years. This other room had the cheaper bulbs when I came and they lasted only a year or two. I switched to the watt-misers and haven't had to replace one yet," he said.

Don't get the wrong idea. Tony isn't all about money and savings. He knows people and tries to give them what they need. He knows that this woman likes the soft-white fluorescent bulbs in her office, so he tries to get them for her because she says that the others are too harsh and hurt her eyes.

Tony bypasses the bargain paper towels and toilet paper because he thinks they are too rough for the younger children at Happy Hearts. "I buy the softer kind. It's not that much more."

The Ohio Department of Education Preschool Licensure inspector recently called Tony's building one of the cleanest schools he'd seen. The State Fire Marshall, during his annual inspection called it "a joy to walk through." People constantly ask, "How old is this building?"

These comments praise a building that daily accommodates multi-handicapped children, many in wheelchairs. It backdrops children learning to eat on their own and use restrooms independently. Yet, a visitor from another school plaintively asks, "Why doesn't my building look like this?"

The answer is they don't have Tony Masters and his pride in his work. Pride makes Tony's floor the shiniest of the shiny. Pride motivates Tony to weld the seat back on the classroom desk so the school wouldn't have to replace "a perfectly good desk." Pride drives Tony to stay after hours to finish a job or come in early to clear snow before buses arrive. The answer is Tony's determination that he does only his best work, a practice that makes it easier for everyone else to do their job.

Tony's beginning to gaze at and briefly mention retirement. He's thinking that he'll tinker with his old cars and putter around the farm. He has set Happy Hearts into a time frame, but he'll work to fill it with deeds and accomplishments. That back door needs painting and the smoke detectors need to be vacuumed. Like he always says, the details make the difference.

Gene Moroski, Founding Parent

Born in 1927 in a farmhouse in Monroe Township, Gene Moroski has been an Ashtabula County Resident his entire life. His father died when he was two years old, and he was raised by his grandparents in Conneaut. At the age of seven, he lost an eye to a freak childhood accident, and the fact that he wore a glass prosthesis made sports or the military not an option in his life. He immersed myself in music, which is an avocation that he still enjoys today, at the age of 91.

Gene married Nadine in the mid-1940's, and their first son Larry was born on March 13, 1947. At first the doctor would not let them see the baby, and later advised them that he had Down's Syndrome, clubbed feet, and a serious digestive blockage. After Larry went through several surgeries and leg castings, the doctors advised the Moroskis to just keep him home and make him comfortable, as he would probably not live to be more than 13 years old. As an alternative, the doctors suggested sending Larry to a state institution, which was the norm at this time. Gene visited one on the Columbus facilities, and determined that his son would never live in these conditions.

Gene and Nadine were also referred to a Doctor in Pittsburgh who claimed that he could use colored lights and a fancy machine to rewire the brain of a disabled individual. On the way home from that appointment, they tearfully realized that that they had to find another path for Larry in the way of some form of education and training. Nadine saw an ad in the Ashtabula Star Beacon asking if there were any parents of disabled children interested in meeting to try to establish some educational facilities for their children. He and Nadine and several other parents met in March 1954, and decided to start a school for handicapped children.

After a long and challenging journey through red tape, financial problems, and plain hard work, Gene, Nadine, and the other parents established Happy Hearts School. During this journey, Gene discovered that State Aid was available at the time, but he and the other founding parents needed local signatures from county agencies to apply for this money. Gene and other parents spent two years giving talks and speeches to every church, social, and ladies' group in the county before they could get the necessary signatures for the State Aid. This became the beginning of Happy Hearts School, and it's 60-year history.

Gene and Nadine's son Larry grew up in Happy Hearts School and worked at Ash/Craft during his adult life. Larry Moroski died on March 15, 2010, two days after his 65th birthday.

His father Gene said, "Because of Happy Hearts and Ash/Craft, we know that our DD individuals can live happy productive lives outside of an institution."

Nadine Moroski, One of the Happy Hearts Founders



Nadine Moroski, one of the founders of Happy Hearts School died on September 15, 2017, at age 90. According to those who knew her, Happy Hearts would not have opened its doors in 1955, without Nadine Moroski. When Nadine and her first husband Gene Moroski's son Larry was born with Down's Syndrome, they looked for help in Ashtabula and they found no services for developmentally disabled people.

Nadine and Gene Moroski went to the state level to find help for their son, but doctors and other medical personnel told them that the only options for Larry were keeping him at home or putting him in an institution. Nadine and Gene and five couples with developmentally disabled children worked together to start Happy Hearts.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Nadine held the office of treasurer and served as a board member of the Retarded Citizens of Ashtabula County, now known as ARC. Over sixty years later at age 90, Nadine still participated in Happy Hearts School activities.

Ann Zeitler, superintendent of Happy Hearts School, who has known Nadine Moroski since 1978, characterized her as "kind, thoughtful, helpful, and generous." She said that in the almost 40 years she knew Nadine she always supported Happy Hearts School, and before Nadine, "there was nothing here for children or adults with developmental disabilities."

"Nadine not only helped start Happy Hearts, but she helped hire teachers, raise funds, and provide donations to support the school. She never lost her interest in helping people with

developmental disabilities. One of her sons received services here, which naturally kept her interest high, but she remained a supporter for a long time after he passed away. She attended every Happy Hearts School graduation I can remember,” Superintendent Zeitler added.

Ellen Kolman of Ashtabula said that Nadine and Gene Moroski were pivotal in assuring a relatively independent life for her 24 year old Autistic son Kevin. “If it hadn’t been for the creation of Happy Hearts, my son might not have as independent a life as he does right now,” she said. “The founders of Happy Hearts were directly responsible for helping many children with disabilities.”

She said her son now works at Ash/Craft Industries.

“As a grateful parent, all I can say is Nadine Moroski remained dedicated to helping children with disabilities until the day she died,” she said. “It was her lifelong mission.”

Wendy Flickinger, Habilitation Manager of Ashcraft Industries, said Nadine Moroski was not only instrumental in starting Happy Hearts School, she was also supportive of Ash/Craft Industries, which provides a work environment for adults with developmental disabilities. “She would come in every week, very nicely dressed, to drop off donations,” she said.

Lisa Palinkas, the Moroski’s granddaughter, said that especially in the 1950s, her grandmother and grandfather were passionate about providing opportunities for children with Down’s Syndrome, Autism, and other developmental disabilities. She said she wants to make sure to preserve her grandmother’s legacy. “There are scrapbooks detailing everything she did and we want to archive it all,” she said. “She was a truly great person.”

Linda Nichols

New Directions, Fall 1994



Linda Nichols remembers when there were 19 individuals in the Ash/Craft program. “I started here in 1968, 26 years ago. I’d like to think I did make a difference in people’s lives by what I do. I certainly try to!” she says.

I enjoy my job. I enjoy the people I work with. I enjoy the staff at Ash/Craft and I’ve worked for twenty-six years because every day is different. the people, the job, the challenge of each day makes Ash/Craft special.”

Linda seems to enjoy people and enjoy life. When you enjoy life, you can’t help but pass this on to other people. For 26 years she has passed this on to literally hundreds of other people, both as a work supervisor and as a co-worker and we’ve all been made a bit richer for the experience.

What was going on with the nineteen workers at Ash/Craft in 1968? We had one job, says Linda. We put advertising labels on Esquire Magazines and delivered them to local doctor’s offices. one job, but it kept us busy. How things have changed in twenty-six years.

Cindy Phillips, Teacher, Acting Principal, Principal



CINDY PHILLIPS

Cynthia Phillips: A Breath of Fresh Air

The Positive Side, Ashtabula County Public Education Employees;

Ashtabula County Sentinel, June 25, 1990

Ashtabula- Her fellow staff members describe her as “a breath of fresh air everywhere she goes,” “The most dynamic, energetic teacher I’ve ever seen,” and “one of the classiest people there is - anywhere.”

Talking about herself, Cindy Phillips simply says that she loves to teach and wishes she could give more to her students. Her students do indeed, need more at times, since they are all developmentally or multi- handicapped. She has continued to give to the students at Happy Hearts School for nine years, and abundantly.

Cindy has taught pre-school children; Intermediate students (12-16); and Advanced students (16-21) for the past nine years and she also spent just over a year as acting principal at Happy Hearts School in 1988-89.

Currently, the Advanced Student Department has developed a job and community curriculum which has already enhanced the potential for these students to enter the job market and make them better prepared for more independent community living.

As one of four teachers in that department, her time and efforts this school year have been focused on that goal. She is also currently completing her master’s degree from Cleveland State University in school administration, with an immediate goal of moving into that phase of school services.

Barb Turchetta’s Intermediate Class Scrapbook- 1991-1994

Barb’s Thank-you’s

To William – for such strong arms. You will be a big help to whoever you encounter.

January 16, 1991. We go to war. We help our troops.

April 1991

War over.

To Matt- for your good behavior. You helped me so much this year.

Poems

Jane Good

I like telephones

Telephones ringing in my
ear

Ear listening to mom and
dad.

I like spaghetti

Spaghetti cooking in pan
Pan bubbling on the stove.

Nick Marsh

I like pizza

Pizza growing on a pan
Pan big and round
On the stove.

To Beth- for teaching me sign language and for
being so nice to me and everyone else.

To Bob- for helping me with manual labor. You
were always there when I needed you.

To Charlie – for giving me a hard time! It
taught me not to be so bossy.

To Jane- for helping and working on the
computer. You are a good helper

To Rob- for being a leader in academics. You
shined, your reading, math and your athletic
ability.

October 3, 1991

Barb Turchetta

These poems were written by Barb Turchetta's
12-15-year-old students at Happy Hearts
School who have multi-handicaps. Barb Said:
"I think they are "wonder-ful" for the ability
level of these students and am excited to share
them with you for possible publication."

Rob Decaro

I like basketball

Basketball bouncing in Hoop,

Hoop shaking in the air.

Matt Mucci

I love pizza

Pizza Mixing in a bowl,

Bowl round and big

Mom cooks pizza

I love Mom.

Renee Barnard

I like sandwiches,

Sandwiches piled high with roast beef,

onions, cheese, tomato, lettuce MMMMMM....Good.

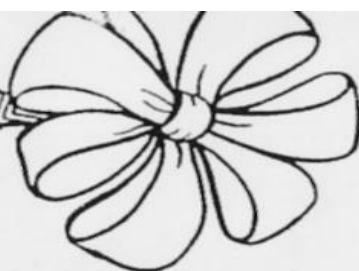
June 3, 1991

Picnic at Good's.

We went to Jane Good's house. We rode in a blue van. Mrs. Higley drove the van. We ate hot dogs, potato chips, applesauce, potato salad, Marconi salad, baked beans and for dessert we had strawberry jello cake. We climbed in the tree house. We played in the sand. We made bubble pictures. We played ball. We had fun.

Your support

is a gift to us!



Sept. 23,
1994

Dear Parents,

We finally found time to write to you. We are very busy moving from class to class this year.

Barb and Amanda finally have their schedules straight!

Amanda has a new wedge. She is smiling more every day.

Jamie is learning numbers and words (in, out, up, down, etc.), getting along better with others, and looking forward to the 1st basketball game.

Matt misses Josh who left us Sept. 16 to move to (Mentor) Broadmoor School.

Matt likes all his classes, especially Band.

Tom will change to a new group Monday, Sept. 26. He will need some help getting used to his new schedule. He likes Mrs. Peck's class.



Friday March 18, 1994

Ashtabula Star Beacon

The following are poems called cinquains. They were written by students attending Happy Hearts School. A cinquain is a type of poem wherein a single word is chosen as a title, two words describing the title follow and three action words come next. The fourth line describes the poets feeling regarding the topic and the fifth line repeats the title.

Basketball

Speedy, jumpy,

Shooting baskets
backwards

Feels great making
points.

Basketball.

Jamie Smock, Ashtabula

Candy.

Sweet, good.

Share, eat, give.

Eating it is happiness.

Candy

Amy Maddox, Ashtabula

Pizza

Round, cheesy

I ate it!

Feels warm and
good.

Pizza.

Dan Hunt,
Conneaut

Snow

Cold, soft

Like making
angels.

Feel full of energy.

Snow.

David Baker,
Ashtabula

Josh,

Gentle, peaceful.

Smiles at me.

I feel warm inside.

Josh.

Nick M.

Bulldozer.

Big, red,

Digging in the dirt,

Proud to drive it.

Bulldozer.

Jeremy Weber, Ashtabula

Flowers.

Pretty, happy, pick, give,
smell.

Flowers make Mom
happy.

Flowers.

B., Ashtabula

Love.

Valentine's Day, happy.

Hug, shake hands,
surprise.

Love makes me feel
excited.

Love.

Hans Stoltz, Geneva

Winter 1995- New Directions

Barb Turchetta also wrote a column for teachers and parents in New Directions, the community newsletter of the Ashtabula County Board of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities.

In a Winter 1995 article she said that “business today is taking the pulse of its customers, and rightly so.” The public sector is beginning to do the same, and the improvement of services will certainly be the result, if we truly listen. We have begun to send satisfaction surveys and to ask how we’re doing to parents and the community.

We need to take some time to consider what it would be like to walk in your shoes, to reaffirm the importance of listening to your comments and your input, and to more closely consider your perceptions of what you see as important to your child or your adult son or daughter. Thank you for taking the time you do to communicate with us on how your child is progressing at school or how your adult son/daughter is doing in our adult programs.

If you have a comment about any aspect of our program, take the time to write to this column expressing your thoughts and feelings. We will try to respond in whatever way is most appropriate, either in this space if it is an issue that everyone may benefit from hearing, or individually, if it is more personal. Please state clearly whether we have your permission to publish your letter here if appropriate.

Letter Home

Monday, September
26, 1994

Dear Parents,

We are learning to use a camera in social skills. We need 2.50 for 12 pictures of ourselves for a book we are writing. We are taking pictures of each other. We are talking about our pictures and learning to listen to each other.

The Social Skills
Class, Per.3

Anne Zeitler, Board Superintendent

Anne M. Zeitler, Superintendent of the Ashtabula County Board of Developmental Disabilities, is the sixth superintendent and the first female superintendent in the history of the Ashtabula County Board of Developmental Disabilities.

Originally from Columbiana, Ohio, she graduated from Crestview High School in 1974 and earned a Bachelor of Science in Education from Bowling Green State University in 1978. Continuing her education, she earned a Master of Education from Cleveland State University and received her administrative licenses from Youngstown State University. She is a 1998 LEADERShip Ashtabula County Graduate.

Even as a child, Anne knew that she wanted work with children, growing up empathizing with them and always wanting to help them learn and have fun

Anne had acquired a strong background working with children with developmental disabilities and after she graduated from Bowling Green State University, she was hoping to be able to locate a job that would allow her to pursue her passion of helping children overcome difficulties, achieve milestones and enjoy their lives to the fullest. She interviewed for the adapted physical education instructor position opening at Happy Hearts School, got the job, and began working at Happy Hearts School in September 1978, teaching adaptive physical education. She coordinated the Special Olympics program, coached track and field, basketball and cross-county skiing, and taught at Happy Hearts School for nine years.

In 1987, Anne accepted a position as program coordinator for a residential facility acting upon a strong desire to begin working with adults with developmental disabilities. In 1988, she returned to the Ashtabula County Board of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities and began working at Ash/Craft Industries as a Vocational Evaluator. In 1998, she became the Principal of Happy Hearts School and in 2002, she was offered and accepted the position of Board Superintendent.

Over the past 40 years, Anne has had the privilege to witness many miracles and work with hundreds of children and adults with developmental disabilities. She has developed long lasting professional relationships with the children she began working with at Happy Hearts School who are now prosperous, happy adults enjoying their lives to the fullest. She considers herself blessed to have had the opportunity to work with and learn from many dedicated and determined colleagues and employees who have shared her devotion to make a difference in the lives of others. She considers it an honor to be a part of the services that have been provided to infants/toddlers, students and adults with developmental disabilities over the lifetime of her career with the Ashtabula County Board of Developmental Disabilities.

Special Story: Iren Beckman, Mother of the Year



Marit Divencenzo, standing and Bridgit Beckman enjoy a day at the annual "Sunshine Special Day" recently at the Happy Hearts School. Sponsored by the Ashtabula Exchange Club, the event is held for the children of the school. June 15, 1984.

June 27, 1982

Linda Warner, staff editor of the Ashtabula Star Beacon, highlighted the story of Iren Beckman of Ashtabula, a divorcee with four children, who the Ashtabula County Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities Board recently chose to be Mother of the Year.

Iren Beckman's daughters Bridgit, 12, and Ericka, 6, both students at Happy Hearts School, were both born with a rare degenerative disease of their nervous systems. Doctors believe the disease is hereditary, but Iren points out that it is so rare that it has no

specific name and there is no known cause or cure for it.

According to Iren, Bridgit appeared to be a normal baby, but Iren worried about the fact that at five months old, Bridgit couldn't hold up her head. Iren took her daughter to Cleveland Clinic for testing and following an examination, the doctor told Iren that Bridgit would never know anyone or be able to learn anything. He recommended putting Bridgit in an institution.

"I couldn't believe it. I told him that no matter what her problems were, I would take care of her and he could go live in an institution," Iren said. At the time, Iren was 19 years old.

Bridgit's sister Ericka, six years younger, had the same disease and she was one of the first babies in the Infant Stimulation Program at Happy Hearts School. In the beginning, Iren and other Ashtabula County mothers would travel to a Kingsville church with their babies to learn how to increase their motor movements and learning capacities. Eventually, the program became based at Happy Hearts.

"I remember when there were no babies to run the program. Now people are more aware that these children need to get out with other people and do things with other children, no matter what's wrong with them," Iren said.

Doctors who tell parents there is no hope upset Iren Beckman. She vows she will never give up hope of new ways to teach her girls. Both girls know basic sign language and Iren believes they are capable of learning many things.

She shares some thoughts to parents with children in the same situation. "Patience is important, but love is the main thing. My kids are really happy. There are so many other kids that aren't happy. If people would only give handicapped people a chance, they would see what they are capable of doing."