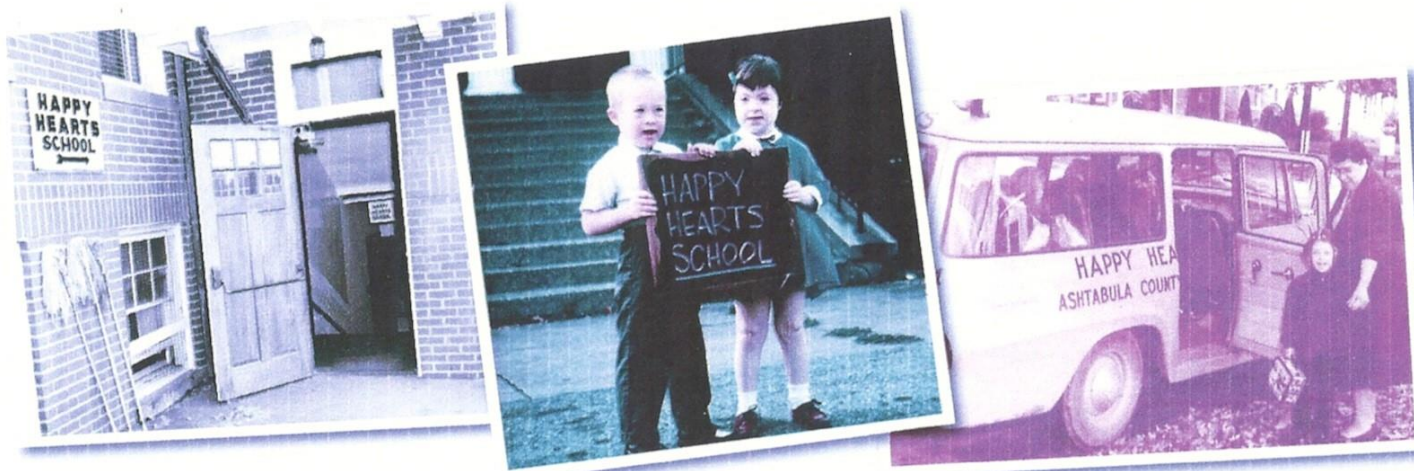


Happy Hearts School and Ash/Craft Industries: Crafted from the Hearts of Caring People



By Kathy

Covert

Warnes

(And the people of

Happy Hearts, Ash/Craft Industries, Incorporated,
and Ashtabula County)



Bobby Stewart of Ashtabula and Tammy Hayes of Conneaut dance at the first Ash/Craft Sock Hop held on April 17, 2010. Photo by Warren Dillaway - Ashtabula Star Beacon

"Happy Hearts"
Alma Mater

dolce

M. DeMarino



Hap - py Hearts with - Blue on Blue The Sun Shines down on you.



Hap - py Hearts with - Blue on Blue our col - ors proud and true..



Through the years we grow and grow. - Our Pride and Love we'll al - ways show.



Hap - py Hearts with - Blue on Blue - our Hearts lift up to you.

Honoring the Hearts and Lives of Happy Hearts People



My brother Kim Covert was born in November 1952, brain damaged from a forceps birth. My mother and father, like countless other parents of handicapped children, had to find personal and community resources to cope and try to give Kim a good quality of life. Happy Hearts served as a vital community resource that built Kim's sense of self-worth and his faith in his ability to accomplish tasks and make positive contributions to his family and community.

Kim would be ready for the Happy Hearts bus to pick him up at least twenty minutes before the scheduled time. He'd talk about his school at the top of his voice (he was deaf) and every night he put Happy Hearts School at the top of the list of his thankful prayers, (usually at the top of his voice)! The Golden Nozzle Award he won for cleaning gas nozzles occupied the place of honor on his bedroom wall. Now it occupies a place of honor in my office and it makes me smile every day. Kim didn't go on to be president of a company or make a million dollars after he graduated from Happy Hearts. He did better than that. He used the skills he had learned from Happy Hearts to enjoy a good quality of life, and for the most part, he enjoyed a happy life. Happy Hearts changed Kim's life, and countless parents and students have had life-changing experiences at Happy Hearts and Ash/Craft. I hope this history, in small part, honors Happy Hearts Ash/Craft people past and present and I dedicate it to them.

Kathy Covert Warnes

This history is dedicated to the people of Ashtabula County who made Happy Hearts School and Ash/Craft Industries possible and the staff, teachers, and volunteers who made them prosper.

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Introduction: Happy Hearts and Ash/Craft Working Through the Years...

Happy Hearts and Ashcraft in the Beginning



Happy Hearts School and Ash/Craft Industries fits into the history of Ashtabula County as snugly as the story of the Ashtabula train wreck or Ashtabula Harbor and maritime events. Disabled and mentally retarded people and their families have often had to fight uphill battles for public education and tools to forge their futures. In March 1954, a small group of Ashtabula County parents of disabled children were determined to provide opportunities for their children to have a brighter future. They created the Ashtabula Council for Retarded Citizens and by March 1955, their actions had enabled Happy Hearts School to open in the basement of the Methodist Church on Elm Street in Ashtabula. The new school opened with five students and was the first school in the county for children with disabilities.

Happy Hearts School continued to grow and operated in several Ashtabula Churches and locations from 1956 to 1968. In 1967, the Ohio Senate passed Senate Bill 169, creating a Board

of Mental Retardation and Ashtabula County voters passed levies to operate the school. In 1968, Happy Hearts School moved to its location on South Ridge Road in Kingsville, and by 1970, the school's program included 233 children and adults. In 1977, Ash/Craft Industries opened its sheltered workshop program, eventually providing over 500 children and adults with meaningful education and training to lead productive lives. By 2002, Happy Hearts offered learning opportunities to 140 children at Happy Hearts School in Kingsville as well as to satellite classrooms in Andover, Braden Junior High, Austinburg Elementary School and Geneva Junior High School.

The passing years brought changes to Ashtabula County and these changes have affected the future of Happy Hearts. A December 2017 story in the Ashtabula Star Beacon explored the directions of the next chapters in Happy Hearts and Ash/Craft history and reported that Happy Hearts currently served a total of 79 children, 45 at Happy Hearts School in Kingsville and 34 at satellite sites in Geneva, Ashtabula, Grand Valley and Pymatuning Valley. In November 2017, voters defeated a levy to continue financing Happy Hearts and Ash/Craft. By early 2018, the Ashtabula County Developmental Disabilities Board transferred operations of Happy Hearts to the Ashtabula County Educational Services Center. Ash/Craft Industries is slated to be privatized.

Through the years, Happy Hearts School and Ash/Craft Industries have provided a solid foundation for developmentally disabled children and adults in Ashtabula County enabling them to build productive and satisfying lives.



Chapter One: Determined Parents Start a School



Happy Hearts in the Beginning: 1950s and 1960s: Learning in Many Locations

On March 14, 1954, a group of concerned and determined parents gathered at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Weintz, Jr. in Geneva, Ohio. The parents were concerned because they hadn't been able to find schools to educate their developmentally disabled children and they were determined to found their own school if the existing ones couldn't or wouldn't take their children.

Parents Create the Ashtabula County Council for Retarded Children

In the 1950s there were few if any social safety nets for children with developmental disabilities including Downs Syndrome, Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Brain Injury, Spinal Bifida, Behavior Disorders and other conditions. Doctors would often give parents of these children the stark choices of keeping their children at home or placing them in an institution. The group of parents that gathered in Geneva on this March Sunday wanted more choices for themselves and their children. They organized the Ashtabula County Council for Retarded Citizens and they elected Gene Moroski of Kingsville, president; Mrs. Stephen Weintz of Geneva, vice president; and Mrs. John Wilkinson of Geneva, secretary. Mrs. Paul R. Berg of Ashtabula later took over as secretary. The Council for Retarded Citizens identified its goals as winning over the general public to recognize and value the school program and adequately funding the school.

The Council spent the next year solving problems they encountered starting the school and helping it grow. They didn't receive financial aid from the county or state until 1957, so they had to sponsor bake sales, dances, and donations to raise funds for the school. The Council faced uphill battles finding qualified teachers who could accept the small salary of \$200 a month. The children attending the school were scattered across Ashtabula County and the parents of the students were responsible for transportation until the Council could afford to hire and station wagon and driver.

Ashtabula County Day School for Retarded Children Opens

Finally, the Council opened the Ashtabula County Day School for Retarded Children on March 14, 1955, in the basement of the First Methodist Church on Elm Avenue in Ashtabula with Mrs. Charles Bennett of Amboy the first teacher and Mrs. Scott Tarleton of Geneva the assistant teacher. Mrs. Bennett had studied two years at Otterbein College and four years at the Moody Bible Institute and worked as a social worker in Cleveland. The two new teachers had to develop their custom teaching techniques as the classes progressed, since they had no guidelines.

The first student roll call consisted of eight children who came to classes on designated weekdays from 9:30 to 1:30. The teachers taught them social graces, eating and handling utensils, paying attention, and following directions. Their parents paid tuition of \$6 per week.

On April 18, 1955, Ohio Secretary of State Ted Brown, granted a non-profit corporation charter to the Ashtabula Council for Retarded Citizens, Inc. Trustees listed were Neal V. Collander of Ashtabula, Joseph P. Malone of Geneva and Robert H. McMurray of Conneaut. The joint efforts of a few parents seeking a school for their own children created the Council for Retarded Citizens and Happy Hearts School in the short space of a year.

Gene Moroski, first president of the organization, spearheaded its activities. Gene and his wife Nadine played a vital role in establishing and expanding the Council from a few interested families to a community wide organization.

In May of 1955, school staff and the Council for Retarded Citizens held an open house for parents and friends to see what the program had accomplished. Funds for the past year came from donations from individuals, organizations, clubs, and many from the November Seal campaign.

School closed at the end of May and reopened in September 1955, in the Methodist Church basement with 12 children enrolled. One teacher and assistant were hired and parents furnished the transportation.

After filling out the reams of paperwork, the Council for Retarded Citizens and the Ashtabula County Day School for Retarded Children applied for state aid under Senate Bill #157 and obtained E1 cards from local school boards. The children underwent IQ tests, medical exams, and Social Maturity tests. Teachers, delegates, and several Council members attended the ARC Convention in Dayton, Ohio. School recessed at the end of May, 1956, and by September school officials were searching for a place to reopen because the Methodists were beginning a remodeling program.

The Harris Memorial Presbyterian Church Years – 1956-1958



1956. Seated around a table, retarded children listen attentively to lessons being read by Mrs. Charles Bennett. The children focus their attention on the teacher. The class is being conducted at Harris Memorial Presbyterian Church. Open house was held at the school Friday night.

On September 4, 1956, the Ashtabula County Council for Retarded Citizens moved the Ashtabula County Day School for Retarded Children to the basement of the Harris Memorial Presbyterian Church, West 58th Street, in Ashtabula. Eighteen pupils were enrolled and they attended classes from 9:30 to 2:00, with their parents paying \$6.00 a week for tuition. The Council hired teachers Mrs. Charles Bennett and Mrs. William Barndt, and the teachers transported the children with their own station wagons with the Council paying the mileage.

In October 1956, the school held an open house to acquaint parents and the public with the school and to view some of the children's accomplishments. To raise funds, the school and the Council participated in the State Seal Drive and the United Fund of Ashtabula City allocated \$950 for the school for the 1957 school year, the only fixed sum the Council received. The Council also raised money at the Ashtabula County Fair by selling homemade candy and later Christmas cards. Country clubs, groups, organizations, and private individuals helped raise money as well with tax stamp redemptions. One mother's club held a Christmas party for the children.

When classes closed the last week in May 1957, approximately twenty students were enrolled in two classes with a full-time teacher for each class. Again, the teachers furnished the transportation while the Council paid for the mileage. In September 1957, classes resumed at Harris Memorial Church in the Sunday School room with two full time teachers and an assistant. Teachers again provided the transportation for the 21 children enrolled with the Council paying the mileage. Parents paid \$15.00 per month tuition, but their children weren't excluded if they couldn't afford to pay the tuition.

At this point, the Ashtabula County Day School for Retarded Children rested on a more solid foundation. The State of Ohio had granted state aid, and the Council for Retarded Citizens raised money by again participating in the Seal campaign. The United Fund increased the Day School's allocation and it provided a fixed sum toward a hot lunch program. Council members, families, and friends raised money by selling home made candy at the Ashtabula County Fair, by collecting tax stamps, and selling Christmas cards. The school also benefitted from the proceeds of fund raisers by local clubs and organizations.

In November of 1957, the School held an open house and the children presented a program. After the program, parents and friends toured the class rooms to view the children's work and learn about their progress for the year. The year 1957 also featured a name change for the school. Council members, Staff, parents, and friends voted on a name and Ashtabula County Day School for Retarded Children became Happy Hearts School.

Besides acquiring a new name, Happy Hearts moved to a new location. On January 21, 1958, the school moved to a two-room brick school building that the Kingsville School had formerly occupied.

An Ashtabula Star Beacon story summarized the progress of the Ashtabula County Day School for Retarded Children during its early years and noted its name change from the Ashtabula County Day School for Retarded Children to Happy Hearts School. During its time at Harris Memorial Presbyterian Church the Ashtabula County Day School for Retarded Children acquired more pupils, funding from the community and state, and a new name.

Mrs. Charles Bennett had already worked for the school for two full years and the Council also added another class and another teacher, Mrs. William Barndt of Austinburg, to help teach the enrolled 20 children. Both of the teachers took special classes at Lake Erie College at their own expense to expand their education. Teachers furnished transportation to and from school.

In 1956, the Ashtabula Council for Retarded Citizens incorporated as a non-profit organization and began to receive financial assistance from the state of Ohio, the United appeal, and tuition from local boards of education for children from their districts. The Council became a member of the Ohio Association for Retarded Citizens, gaining validation to move its program forward for legislation and a long-range development plan for retarded children and adults in Ashtabula County.

Parents were also charged tuition, but this tuition was often waived when the parents couldn't afford to pay it, according to Council President Moroski. He said that in the future the school hoped to eliminate the tuition fee. "We do not refuse any youngster now," he said.

On April 10, 1957, the Ohio House of Representatives passed a bill placing the educational program of the Ashtabula County Day School for Retarded Children under the administration of

the Department of Education and granting approximately 30 percent financial aid to the school. The Department required that teachers and classes receive its stamp of approval and changed the tuition rate from \$6.00 a week to \$15 a month and the teachers' salary to \$300 a month. In July the Ashtabula County Council for Retarded Citizens unanimously changed the name of the school to Happy Hearts.

1958-1960: Still Moving and Still Growing

Going to School in Kingsville

Happy Hearts School soon outgrew the Harris Memorial Presbyterian Church and on January 21, 1958, Happy Hearts, its possessions and pupils moved lock stock and three teachers to a little school building on School Street in Kingsville. The students and teachers enjoyed complete kitchen facilities, two large classrooms with individual desks and a playground. The teaching staff had an office and the three full time teachers taught three classes. A total of 28 children learned life skills in their new classrooms.



More room for classes is the feature of this building donated to the Happy Hearts School for Retarded Children by the Kingsville Board of Education. Also equipped with full kitchen facilities, the building formerly housed classes of the Kingsville Schools. January 23, 1958.

In April 1958, a delegate and alternate from the Ashtabula County Council for Retarded Citizens attended the annual convention in Youngstown and several Council members were also present

to witness the Council receive the award for the Best Press Book. Registration for the fall 1958 term took place at the last Council Meeting in May, with 28 pupils enrolling for the fall term. The school closed at the end of May and reopened at the Kingsville location the first part of September 1958.

Once again, the Council set up a booth at the Ashtabula County Fair selling home made candy, making a net profit of \$530.00. Later in the fall, the Council and friends sponsored a booth at the Fall Festival in Jefferson, making a good profit and staff and friends of Happy Hearts sold Christmas cards and candles to benefit the school.

Happy Hearts School reopened in September 1958 with 34 pupils enrolled in three classes. A full-time teacher taught each class and each pupil paid \$1.00 to \$1.50 every week, according to their home school district. Mrs. Paul Wing of the Ashtabula County Bible Club taught a Bible class for one hour one day each week.

This school year, the Council hired three drivers and two teachers, each using their own car to transport students. The drivers now earned a salary as well as mileage.

On November 7, 1958, Happy Hearts School sponsored an open house, with the students presenting the program. Parents and friends enjoyed the program and then toured the classrooms to view the work and progress of each class. The Council provided coffee and cookies for everyone.

The annual Seal Campaign held in November and the United Fund which increased its allocation for the next year, provided financial support for the school and again, tax stamps were collected for additional income.

Onward to Austinburg!

In January 1959, the Ashtabula County Council for Retarded Citizens hired Mrs. Paul Berg as a part time clerical assistant. One teacher was hired for the coming year to replace Mrs. Esther Bennett, who was moving to Florida at the end of the school year in May. One assistant was hired to aid the three teachers in the fall term.

By 1959, the student population had expanded to over 40 children and Happy Hearts had outgrown the Kingsville school. On September 8, 1959, the friends and faculty again picked up the school and moved it to the former Austinburg grade school building which Happy Hearts received rent free with only utilities and janitor expenses. The school had four classrooms for the children and the faculty consisted of Mrs. Ray Bolmeyer of Rock Creek, superintendent; Mrs. Roger Sisson of Madison; and Mrs. Vincent Bishop and Miss Barbara White of Ashtabula. The school curriculum grew to include music, small skills, simple games, the art of talking, and the beginning of the three R's, Reading, 'Riting, and 'Rithmetic. Volunteers came in to teach music and conduct a Bible Class. The tuition rate was adjusted from \$15 a month to \$75 a year and if a parent couldn't afford tuition, their child could still attend Happy Hearts.

The Ashtabula County Council for Retarded Citizens also oversaw the purchase of the first bus for the school to ease transportation problems. Three drivers were hired to drive their own cars.

The United Appeal allocated money to Happy Hearts School to help meet expenses and the Council for Retarded Citizens and other organizations held bake and rummage sales and ran a candy booth at the Ashtabula County Fair. The Council also sold Christmas and greeting cards.

Ashtabula County Council for Retarded Citizens Meets, Eats, Elects Officers, and Installs Staff



Gathered around new equipment for the Happy Hearts School are newly elected officers (left to right) Mrs. Wilho Brunell, financial secretary; Mrs. Paul Berg, secretary; Mrs. Lawrence Custead, treasurer; W.E. Davies, vice-president; and Gene Moroski, president.

Ashtabula County Council for Retarded Citizens elected and installed officers at the Annual Meeting held in Happy Hearts School, Austinburg.

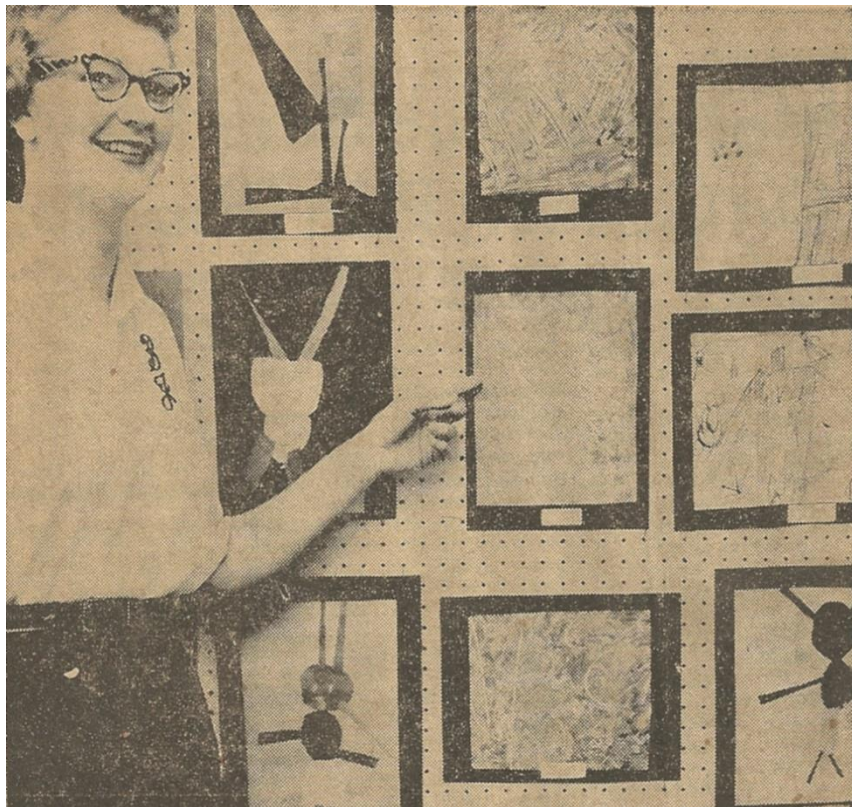
Installed were Gene Moroski, Kingsville, president; Winthrop Davis, Conneaut, vice-president; Mrs. Paul Berg, Ashtabula, secretary; Mrs. Wilho Brunell, financial secretary; and Mrs. Lawrence Custead, Ashtabula, financial secretary.

Committee chairmen for 1959 gave their reports. Teachers gave their reports telling of class progress, goals, and problems.

Teachers are Mrs. Ray Bolmyer, Rock Creek, Superintendent; Mrs. Roger Sisson, Painesville; and Mrs. Vincent Bishop and Miss Barbara White, both of Ashtabula. Special recognition was given to volunteer teachers, Mrs. Fred Andrus, Austinburg, Bible Instructor and Miss Ruth Cook, Ashtabula, music instructor. Roger Sisson explained the jungle gym which he made for the younger pupils.

A pot luck supper for council members, teachers and guests preceded the meeting. The supper committee included Mrs. Joseph Kapen, Jefferson; Mrs. Melvin Cichy, Pierpont; and Mrs. Charles vonTesmar.

Happy Hearts Student Art Work on Display



Happy Hearts School students work is on display this week at the Fine Art Center. Displaying the work is Miss Barbara White, teacher at the school.

Time Line, 1950s

March 14, 1954

- Ashtabula County Council for Retarded Citizens organized. The history of Happy Hearts School and the Ashtabula County Board of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities can be traced back to a meeting of concerned parents in March 1954 at which the Ashtabula County Council for Retarded Citizens was formed. Those at the meeting were:
Mr. and Mrs. Paul Berg; Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Kapen; Mr. and Mrs. G.L. Klozar;
Mr. and Mrs. Gene Moroski; Mr. and Mrs. James Toomey; Mr. and Mrs. Steven Weintz
Mr. and Mrs. John Wilkinson.

March 30, 1954

- Public meeting at Spencer School. Mrs. Yeoman, teacher at Lake County School for Retarded Children, spoke and answered questions. Well attended by parents, teachers, school superintendents, and interested people.

May, 1954

- Board of directors formed.

June 29, 1954

- Public meeting to find out how to organize school and raise funds. Mr. Robert Cooke of Mahoning County Council for Retarded Children spoke. Attending were Dr. Joseph Miller, Senator Ralph Humphrey, R.S. Lanham, Superintendent of Harbor School.

July, 1954

- Met with school officials at Ashtabula High School to see how the public schools could help. Outcome: Legally, schools can help us, but don't have to help.

August 30, 1954

- Film shown to public: "Children Limited" at Kingsville Church.

October 30, 1954

- Petition circulated to parents for them to sign in order to get a class started. Was sent to State Department of Welfare.

November, 1954

- Put notice in area papers to find teachers for our school.

December 21, 1954

- Howard Scherman of Sunny Lane School for Retarded Children in Willoughby, spoke on how their school got started. Mr. Scherman is also head of Willoughby Elementary Schools. It is also interesting to note that their school was started first and then a "Parents Group" later.

January 18, 1955

- Public film and speaker at Ashtabula High. Film was “Forget Not These Children.” Miss Phyllis Newton, psychologist of Geneva, spoke and answered questions. Invitations and notices were sent to all county and city schools, organizations, and groups.

January 1955

- Editorial in Star Beacon explaining need and what we are aiming for. Also stated need for official recognition.

December and January, 1955

- Committee went to all schools and churches in Ashtabula looking for space for classes to start. Methodist Church offered basement Sunday School room.

January 27, 1955

- Dr. Purcell, head of Special Education in Ohio, Division of Mental Hygiene, met in Jefferson with Commissioners, Child Welfare Board and anyone interested. Dr. Purcell explained how to start a school in Ashtabula county and told Mr. Camp, then head of the Child Welfare Board, that it was “his baby.” Dr. Purcell also stated it was the biggest meeting of interested people in one county and yet what has happened to all these people?

February, 1955

- Applications for school.

March 4, 1955

- School opened at Methodist Church – 9:30 to 1:30. Eight enrolled. Teacher, Mrs. Charles Bennett. Assistant, Mrs. Scott Tarleton.

April 18, 1955

- Non-profit Corporation Charter granted by Ted Brown, Secretary of State.

May 17, 1955

- First Open House at School. Open to public.

September, 1955

- School opened again.

September 20, 1955

- Dr. James spoke to Council.

October, 1955

- Mrs. Charles Bennett spoke to Council.

November, 1955

- Seal Campaign

December, 1955

- The book, "Understanding Retarded in Ohio," was put in Ashtabula Harbor, Conneaut and Kingsville Libraries.

1956

April 20, 1956

- County Welfare Federation Panel: Dr. Stephane Ralph, Superintendent of County Schools, Finley; Mr. Strauss of Mental Hygiene in State; ad Mrs. Paul Berg, our Council Secretary. Reverend William Barndt, Moderator.

July, 1956

- Met with Child Welfare Board. Previous meetings were set up, but always canceled or not enough people attended to have a meeting. Members of the Child Welfare Board were invited ay times to attend our Council meetings to aid in our work.

September, 1956

- Harris Memorial Church in Ashtabula offered space for our classes and school was opened in September with 18 pupils enrolled. Two teachers were hired and also transportation is being furnished.
- Two teachers and one assistant employed.
- Tuition remained at \$6 per week.
- Council received \$950 dollars from United Fund.

October, 1956

- Open House at school.

1957

- Program was granted state aid.
- Two teachers and one assistant employed.
- Tuition rate at \$15 per month.
- Ashtabula Star Beacon clipping. August 31, 1957. Ashtabula County Council for Retarded Citizens by unanimous vote, chose the name of "Happy Hearts" for the school to be held in Harris Memorial Presbyterian Church. Two teachers and one fulltime assistant were hired to staff school.

1958

- Program moved to old brick school building in Kingsville.
- Three classes with three teachers.
- Enrollment of 34.

1959

- Austinburg school board loaned the Council a four-room brick school building.
- Enrollment at 48.
- Four full-time teachers
- One bus and one station wagon purchased for transportation. Tuition rate at \$75 per year.

Sources of Income:

- Individual Donations
- United Fund of Ashtabula
- Seal Campaign
- Group and Organizational Donations
- Sales Tax Stamp Redemption
- Tuition Fees
- Council Activities

Proposed Sources of Income:

- State Aid
- County Commissioners
- Local School Boards
- Child Welfare Board

Expenses

- Teachers Wages
- Transportation
- Milk for lunches
- Supplies
- Building rental – heat, light and janitorial services
- Council expenses – seals, postage, stationery, public education material, conventions, Ohio Association dues, IQ tests

Fund Raising

Bake Sale – July 1954-----\$125.00

Variety Booth at Amboy Firemen's Charity Dinner- September 10 &11----\$70

Seal Campaign- November 1954, 1955, 1956

Pamphlets given out at fair in August 1955

Sold homemade candy at fair, August 1956

Conventions

Members attended:

First – Cleveland at Carter Hotel – May 1954

Second-Toledo – May 1955

Third – Dayton – April 1956

Fourth-Mansfield- May 3-5, 1957

Teachers and Classes, 1959

Teacher: Miss Barbara White

Students

Paula Berg, Ashtabula

Arthur Campbell, Kingsville

Daniel Custead, Ashtabula

Melanie Walker, Conneaut

Rena Hudson, Pierpont

Francis McLaughlin, Rock Creek

John Pickett, Ashtabula

Carol Sandfield, Ashtabula

Ross Scibona, Geneva

Wanda Hopkins, Conneaut

Donna Bowers, Ashtabula

Paul DiNickle, Ashtabula

Teacher: Mrs. Bishop

Richard Bowers, Ashtabula

Wayne Copeland, Ashtabula

-----Brown, Ashtabula

Diane Dickson, Conneaut

Virginia Gregory, Geneva

Rose Mauro, Ashtabula

Barbara Mauro, Conneaut

Orville Pagett, Ashtabula

Barbara Weddle, Jefferson

Dorothy Wilkison, Geneva

Nancy Freeman, Orwell

Mary Davies, Ashtabula

Mrs. Bolmeyer

June Cichy, Pierpont

Carol Horne, Ashtabula

Patricia Kapen, Jefferson

Linda Meinke, Conneaut

Daniel Morano, Conneaut

William Roux, Jefferson

Thomas Utter, Geneva

Robert Von Tesmar, Ashtabula

James Weagraff, Ashtabula

William Barrett, Ashtabula

Sharon Ann Jones, Geneva

James Kessler, Ashtabula

Mrs. Sisson

Daniel Brunell, Kingsville

Rebecca DiNickle, Ashtabula

Michael Forbes, Conneaut

Clair Fadden, Orwell

Kathy Hart, Orwell

Mary Kehoe, Conneaut

John Morano, Conneaut

Larry Moroski, Kingsville

Ralph G. Russell, Geneva

Michael Sabados, Conneaut

Arthur Bunner, Geneva

Special Story: Gene and Nadine Moroski Make a Life-Changing Parenting Decision

In 1947, Gene and Nadine Moroski had to make a life-changing decision about their new born son Larry. Doctors had diagnosed him with Downs Syndrome and they gave his grieving and confused parents the options of keeping him at home with little hope of an active intellectual life or placing him in a state institution.

After the young couple's faith in a German specialist and his changing the brain theory produced no results, Gene and Nadine accepted the fact that they couldn't change their son's brain. Frustrated yet determined, they decided to do something themselves to help Larry instead of leaving his fate in the hands of doctors and state institutions. They just weren't sure what to do next.

Then Nadine Moroski saw an advertisement in the Ashtabula Star Beacon stating that mentally retarded children could be helped and asking for interested parents to call a telephone number listed at the bottom of the advertisement. Nadine called the telephone number which belonged to the Weintz family of Geneva, and she and Gene and several other parents attended the first meeting of the future Ashtabula County Association for Retarded Citizens.

During the first few meetings, parents learned what resources district schools offered to children with developmental disabilities and mental retardation. The experts from the school districts advised the group of parents to create a board of directors with the mission of establishing services for their children. Gene explained that he visualized a school on a farm for the children to garden, care for animals, and possibly reside there – a cradle to the grave system of care.

Eventually, the parents decided on a city instead of a farm model, and with the promise of donated space, they began raising funds for their school.

Nadine recalled that the parents held bake sales and sent out printed seals asking for donations for the school. They spoke at PTAs, women's groups, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, anyone willing to listen and contribute to their dream. After they earned \$1,000 they bought supplies and hired teacher Esther Bennett of Conneaut.

In a 1955 story in the Conneaut News-Herald, Gene Moroski said that Mrs. Esther Bennett was a good teacher who seemed to know instinctively what to teach special needs children. He recalled that as well as teaching students, Mrs. Bennett picked them up for school and made their lunches.

Nadine said that Mrs. Bennett was a beautiful person and she didn't think that the school could have gotten started without Mrs. Bennett.

The first class of five students and their teacher Mrs. Bennett met in the basement of the First United Methodist Church in Ashtabula, in March 1955. As the enrollment grew, so did the importance of naming the new school.

Nadine Moroski remembered the night in 1957 that the parents voted on a name for the school. The parent board met at the Harris Memorial Presbyterian Church and everyone submitted possible names for the school. According to the story, Nadine said "we all agreed on Happy Hearts because we thought we could make some hearts very happy."

Several of the Board members said they chose Happy Hearts as a name because they felt it reflected the people of Ashtabula County who generously gave to any person with a disability.

In 1968, the parent board that would be renamed the Ashtabula County Board of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities successfully campaigned for a tax levy throughout Ashtabula County to build the Happy Hearts School.

Gene Moroski's dream of cradle to the grave help for special needs children came true at Happy Hearts which offered an early intervention program for infants, classes for primary and intermediate students, and activities for adults and senior citizens at Ash/Craft Industries.

Larry Moroski, one of the original students at Happy Hearts School that his parents helped start, was one of the first students to graduate from Happy Hearts to Ash/Craft Industries. His mother said that he went to work every day "and just loves it." Larry also participated in the Special Olympics. When Happy Hearts celebrated its 50th Anniversary in 2005, Larry, then 55, and at least two of the other original students were part of the celebration.

After an active, fulfilled life made possible because of the dreams and determination of his parents, Larry died on March 15, 2010. His father played "Wooly Bully", Larry's favorite song, at his funeral.