

## Society's attitude toward mentally retarded has progressed greatly

By STEVEN M. EIDELMAN

Advocates for people with mental retardation have long envisioned a future in which people will be known for their contributions, rather than for their limitations. They have led the way in a struggle to win acceptance for all people, to eliminate labeling according to handicaps, and to give people the power to make decisions about their own lives.

These proponents of equality and opportunity for all are quick to point out new challenges and goals to be reached. Pushing ever forward, they are committed to achieving nothing less than a world free of prejudice and full of acceptance and opportunity for all people regardless of handicap.

While these goals are lofty, they are attainable—and advocacy will continue to be essential to their achievement. It is necessary to look to the future, and to help people work toward better lives, it is also necessary to pause occasionally to reflect on past achievements—to see how far we have come.

For people with mental retardation, and for the friends, families and advocates who have worked so hard on their behalf, the world has come a long way. Not so long ago, children born with mental retardation were written off at birth. Doctors did not hesitate to tell the parents of newborns with mental retardation, particularly those who also had serious medical challenges, to "put the child away in Pennhurst State School and forget about him, it will be best for everyone."

The thought of a medical professional, or anyone else, making a similar statement today would shock anyone with even minimal knowledge about the abilities of people with handicaps. Fueled by the fervor of advocates and family members, the outlook and opportunities for a child born today with a developmental handicap is worlds away from a few short years ago.

The closure of the once infamous Pennhurst Center in 1987 served as a symbolic milestone in a system-wide transformation that began with parental advocacy in the early 1960s.

In 1967, more than 11,800 people still lived in state-operated centers. At that time state centers nationwide served as little more than human warehouses. Pennhurst Center alone once cared for as many as 3,500 clients.

The institutions were often hard-pressed to meet their meager mission of providing custodial care for thousands of residents with mental retardation, there was little effort made to encourage individual services, or even to recognize those in care as individual people. Few people had the opportunity to live in the community, and those who did were only able to do so as the result of support from family and friends.

The first major step away from "warehousing" came in 1963, when the President's Commission on Mental Retardation presented its plan establishing a national trend toward community living and away from large institutional care. Federal funding followed in the form of the Mental Retardation Facilities and Community Mental Health Centers Construction Act of 1963, which provided money to establish community facilities, and in 1965 amendments to the Social Security Act that made people with disabilities eligible for Medicaid.

The community services ball was rolling and Pennsylvania helped lead the way with the establishment of a system of community services for people with mental retardation under the MH/MR Act of 1966. Landmark court decisions in Pennsylvania and Alabama in 1971 and 1972 helped to establish the rights of people with mental retardation to a free and appropriate public education, and to care and treatment in settings that did not restrict their lives and activities.

Further federal legislation in the early 1970s provided people with disabilities protection from discrimination, new rights to free educational opportunities based on individual needs, and mandated advocacy systems to ensure quality care and services.

Within the last decade, self-advocacy groups, composed of individuals with handicaps, have formed to give government officials and service providers first-hand information on the types of supports that are most desirable. Their voices have given us a clearer vision of the lives that people with handicaps want, and the supports they want and need to achieve such lives.

With these thoughts in mind, state and federal officials have moved forward to provide improved access to transportation for individuals with handicaps, to prohibit discrimination in hiring, and to eliminate unfair housing practices that effectively made it possible to locate homes for people with retardation in residential areas.

In addition to these major legislative and judicial changes, improvements in the provision of services that help people with handicaps to learn skills for independence have increased tenfold.

At the first sign of developmental delay, children in Pennsylvania can receive individualized early intervention services that help them keep pace with their peers, by reaching and maintaining their maximum physical and cognitive potentials. By providing therapy at an early age, these services help keep educational and social gaps from forming between handicapped children and their peers, gaps that in the past have been all but impossible to bridge.

As children grow, flexible financial supports now give families resources to buy the services they need to keep handicapped family members at home, where they want and need to be grown. Lack of these resources in the past has often resulted in the institutionalization of a person for the want of simple things like money to pay for a babysitter or a visiting nurse.

All of these legal decisions, new laws, and special programs were motivated by the efforts of advocates, family members and people with disabilities. For people with mental retardation and other disabilities, they have meant a world of difference, but even more important are the changes in public attitude that have occurred over the same time period.

While laws and regulations can mandate services and prohibit discrimination, they cannot require acceptance, and acceptance is what people with handicaps want more than anything else. They want other people to accept their abilities and contributions, to accept and return their friendship and most importantly, to accept them as active members of the community. Only changes in attitude and understanding can bring about this kind of public acceptance.

Fortunately, attitudes are changing, people with handicaps are finding greater acceptance in our communities. Children with handicaps are participating in regular school classes and adults are landing competitive jobs. People with handicaps are being featured in television advertisements and handicapped actors are playing important roles in major motion pictures and popular TV programs. If the adage holds true that television and movies offer a good reflection of American values and attitudes, then people with mental retardation and other handicaps have come a long way over the past 25 years.

True, we have not yet reached the lofty goal of universal acceptance for all people, regardless of handicap or condition. There is still prejudice and ignorance to be rooted out. There are still those who feel that people should be treated and labeled according to disability rather than ability. But their ranks are constantly shrinking.

Yes, there is a long way to go, and people with disabilities, families, and advocates will lead the way. But the road behind us has also grown long, and lengthens with each passing day. And it is important to remember that we have accomplished much, and that things have changed for people with handicaps, for the better.

The author is the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare's Deputy Secretary for Mental Retardation. Governor Casey recently designated March, 1991 as Mental Retardation Awareness Month.



Hungry purple finches

(Post Photo/Charlotte Bartizek)

## Library news

### Antiques on display at Back Mountain Library commemorate annual show

By NANCY KOZEMCHAK

The display case at the Back Mountain Memorial Library is showing a lovely collection of antiques to announce and commemorate the up-coming 39th annual Prince of Peace Episcopal Church Antiques Show Sale which will be held on May 7 and 8 at the church.

The center of the display is featuring a Ladies London and Paris book of Fashion for the years 1838 and 1842. The fashion pictures in the book are hand tinted and show the spring fashions for May 1839. The book is open to a colored picture of these fashions. The book was brought from England in 1850.

A white doily, hand crocheted from the turn of the century is settling off a large cut glass berry bowl with a silver ladle. The display features elegant high period cut glass including two large vases, a vinegar cruet, a Victorian toothpick holder and a mustard jar with a silver spoon.

Several Victorian sterling silver serving pieces are displayed; a ladies button hook/combination

knife, called a ladies piece; a cigar tip clipper with a loop to be worn on a gentleman's watch chain. There are two English ladies brooches from 1890. These were handmade and can be worn on a chain or as a brooch.

There is a unique silver plate Guernsey jug which is used to keep the good Guernsey milk (which is richer than Jersey milk) warm for serving on the table. Warm milk was served to be used for cereal. The jug has a rattan handle to protect the hand from burns.

This display is set on a deep pink cloth and makes an exquisite display to herald the coming of the spring season. Similar items as on display will be available for sale at the antique show. The display will be at the library until May 8.

National Library Week, 1991 is being celebrated from April 14 through 21. The library has several displays featuring activities for this special week.

There are several shadow boxes with books which were made by the first grade children of Gate of

Heaven School in conjunction with National Library Week. Two of the special boxes are: Frosty the Snowman by Kelly Wallick and Big Road Race by Jeff Sarmanis. These are being shown in the office area of the library.

There are bookmarks for taking home for children and adults. The theme for 1991 is "Year of the Lifetime Reader". The library has received three new books from the Visual Geography Series. They are: "Saudi Arabia" in pictures featuring the land, history and government, the people and the economy.

"Kuwait" in pictures with photographs and text to introduce the geography, history, government, people culture and economy of the small oil-rich country on the Persian Gulf.

"Iraq" in pictures is fully revised and updated with new photographs, maps, charts and captions. Featured are the people, economy, history and government and the land including Baghdad and religious sites.

### Area musicians to perform at Misericordia

Two local musicians will conclude College Misericordia's 1990-91 Noontime Series with a performance of guitar and flute music on Wednesday, April 24 at noon in the MacDonald Art Gallery. The concert is free and open to the public.

Jean Anastasia, guitarist and Nancy Sanderson, flutist, will perform a program of solo and duo works by Giuliani, Stravinsky, Wolf-Ferrari and others.

Anastasia, a graduate of the Hartt School of Music and an active recitalist, serves as director of the Wilkes Community Conservatory and is a guitar instructor for the Conservatory and the Encore Music Camp of Pennsylvania.

Sanderson is director of the Encore Music Camp and is an adjunct professor of music in the Wilkes University Department of Music, Theatre and Dance. She also is an active recitalist and freelance flutist in Northeastern Pennsylvania.

## Only yesterday

60 Years Ago - April 24, 1931  
**DALLAS BOROUGH TO BUY DUMP TRUCK**

Former Adelman Lumber Yard leased by R.R. Church will probably be used as a storage and distributing plant for the wholesaling of lubricating oils.

Dallas Borough Council at a special meeting last Thursday night voted to advertise for bids on a 1 1/2 ton motor dump truck for the use of the street department and 6,000 gallons of tar oil to be used on the streets. They also voted to accept Davenport Street in the Parrish Heights section.

Rural baseball league to open its season Saturday with Dallas at Idetown; Shavertown at Beaumont and Meeker at East Dallas.

Wed - Florence Mae Long and Erwin R. Denmon.

50 Years Ago - April 25, 1941  
**THIRD LANE MADE FOR ROAD TO FERNBROOK**

Dallas Township Band to present a concert tonight at the high school.

Banks Construction Company will begin laying the third lane of concrete from Dallas to Fernbrook on Monday.

An 'Oscar' will be presented to the outstanding performer in Monday night's show sponsored by the Dr. Henry M. Laing Fire Company.

First Sgt. Harold Rood of the newly-organized Service Battery of the 109th Field Artillery stationed at Indiantown Gap, writes that the Battery is in need of many articles for its recreational hall.

"Philadelphia Story" starring Katherine Hepburn, James Stewart and Cary Grant is playing this weekend at Himmler Theatre.

Wed - Elizabeth Palmer and Frederick Donald Finney.

Engaged - Alice Johnston and William F. Kishbaugh, Jr.

40 Years Ago - April 20, 1951  
**EBERLE NAMED HEAD OF TEACHERS GROUP**

Within a few days Sordoni Construction Company will start to build ducts and manhole chambers along Main and Lake Streets for underground cables leading to the Commonwealth Telephone Company general office building on Lake Street.

Charles Eberle is named president of the Shavertown Parent Teachers Association.

Thousands of yards of earth are being moved for the new Meadowcrest Housing project between Trucksville Gardens and Bunker Hill.

Between 350 and 400 persons will attend the Library Auction Dinner Tuesday.

Dallas Kiwanis to sponsor Back Mountain 4-H Calf Club.

Engaged - Mary Gilligan and Norman Stair; Joan R. Coolbaugh and Laing Coolbaugh.

Wed - Rebecca Hummel and John E. Boone; Lorraine Turner and James Jolley; Joan Shafer and Kenneth Booth.

Bi-County Baseball League will open Sunday.

30 Years Ago - April 20, 1961  
**SLAFF HONORED AS 'MAN OF THE YEAR'**

Auction Dinner slated for Thursday, May 4, with Charles Mannear and George McCutcheon as co-chairmen of this year's library auction.

Civil defense training will be held at Kunkle, April 26.

Frank Slaff is named 'Man of the Year' by Atlantic Coast Distributors Association.

Engaged - Sandra Felter and Milton Moyer; Arline Ruth Misson and John Anzalone.

St. Paul's Lutheran Church is taking part in Family Altar Mission next week.

Sara Gregory of Lehman passed the theoretical and practical examination given by the Wyoming Valley Board of Women Officials and is now rated as a local basketball official.

20 Years Ago - April 22, 1971  
**AREA ANGLER ENJOYS SUCCESSFUL FIRST DAY**

Trout season sees record as an angler strolled along shore with a string of trout, the smallest one 20 inches long.

Dallas School Board unanimously elected Dr. Linford Werkheiser as superintendent of the district.

Dallas Intermediate School to host bloodmobile, April 30, at the school 11:45 a.m. to 5:45 p.m.

Sweet Valley plans its annual Memorial Day Parade.

Dallas Senior Edward Labatch, Jr. has received an appointment to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y.

Dallas takes Lake-Lehman trackmen collecting 13 firsts in the 18 events.

Engaged - Pat Hughey and Charles A. Kern; Betty Ann Weaver and Thomas Paul Shaver.

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