

Arc leader gains fulfillment from helping hand to others

By KYLIE SHAFFERKOETTER
Post Staff

DALLAS - March is Mental Retardation Awareness Month and Karen Belli wants to make sure the community knows it. As president of The Arc of Luzerne County, formerly Association for Retarded Citizens, Belli and a slew of other volunteers are dedicated to community education and advocacy.

"We want to show that people with mental retardation are a vital and important part of the community," said Belli of Dallas, who has been involved with The Arc since 1988 and has been president for nearly two years.

Belli said she has always been inclined to help. "My mother said I was a natural teacher as a child."

Growing up in Chicago, Belli knew she wanted to be a school teacher from a young age. She pictured herself teaching conventional students in the conventional way, but a summer job during her college years changed her plans. Belli worked at a camp for adults with developmental disabilities and discovered who she really wanted to help.

She graduated from Mundelein College in Chicago, with a degree in Sociology and education. She's since worked for a variety of organizations, including, Social Services, United Cerebral Palsy and the Education Opportunity Center.

In addition to being The Arc's president, Belli is currently executive director of the Deutsche Institute, a small non-profit organization that provides recreational opportunities for people with disabilities.

The Deutsche Institute has an office at College Misericordia and in Scranton. It runs recreational programs for all age groups throughout the week.

"I like The Arc and Deutsche Institute because you get to go outside the classroom," said Belli. There is an overlap by the people involved with both organizations.

The Arc is a non-profit organization that has been helping people with mental retardation and their families for more than 40 years.

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**Karen Belli
President, The Arc**



At The Arc's home office in Wilkes-Barre, seated, from left, Faith Oneu, volunteer and Cindy Lefko, vice-president. Standing, Sherry Pudim, volunteer and Karen Belli, president.

Arc works for advocacy. This means working to assure each person with mental retardation the opportunity to maximize full participation in all aspects of community life. Arc informs and assists students, parents and organizations on educational issues and works to assure that everyone receives quality services to reach their potential.

Belli said Arc does many things to ensure people are taken care of and not taken advantage of. Arc will attend meetings at schools with parents to make sure the child is getting what they need to succeed. Also, Arc will help people from out-of-state find places to live and help in cases of abuse.

"We monitor the quality of programs in Luzerne County and protect the rights of people," said Belli.

Arc also monitors legislation, holds support groups, work incentive programs and art programs. It has an all volunteer board of directors who come from a variety of backgrounds.

"The board is an interesting mix and cross-section," said Belli. The 22-person board includes bankers, lawyers, recreational therapists and parents.

Cindy Lefko of Wyoming, Arc vice-president, said many people are not quite sure what mental retardation is. "It's surprising how many people don't know the difference between mental illness and mental retardation," said Lefko, who works for CoreStates Bank and has a degree in special education. "We try to let people know that people have mental retardation, but they are not retarded people."

"Mental retardation is defined as impaired mental development which originates either before or during birth or early childhood. It

results in a slowness or limitation in intellectual development, emotional or social development and in academic and vocational progress," states an Arc pamphlet.

Lefko said people on the board educate others in their field who might never have known what Arc is and who it benefits.

Sherry Pudim of Exeter is a person who benefits from Arc. She has been involved with the organization since she was a child, her mother is an Arc director. "It helps the people. If anyone has a problem they can come here," she said, as she ran to answer the office phone. Pudim has worked at the Arc office in Wilkes-Barre for two years.

Faith Oneu, who has Down syndrome, has worked as a vol-

unteer in the Arc office for three years. She does a little of everything there. "I like to help the clients here and help out the rest of the staff," she said.

Three out of every 100 children born this year in the United States will be born or become mentally retarded. Six million people nationally are mentally retarded, more than 350,000 in Pennsylvania, and more than 10,500 in Luzerne County.

Arc is a vast resource for families and individuals, said Lefko. "If anyone has a friend or relative with mental retardation, we can be their first step and direct them in the right direction."

To become an Arc member, volunteer or to get more information, call 829-7953.

Mental Retardation Awareness Month activities sponsored by The Arc:

- Sun. March 15, **Sabbath/Sunday Interfaith Service** will be held for people with mental retardation, their families and friends. The service will be held at St. Nicholas Church in Wilkes-Barre.
- Tues. March 17, noon, **Open Board Meeting** will be held at Perugino's Restaurant in Luzerne.
- Sun. March 29, 2 p.m., **Springtime Basket Bingo** will be held in the Bishop O'Reilly gym. Doors open at 12:30 p.m. Admission is \$10, includes three cards per game.
- Wed. April 29, 7-9 p.m., **Valley With A Heart Hop** to be held at the Holiday Inn in Wilkes-Barre. Admission is a canned goods donation or monetary donation.

Also, the Back Mountain Police Association will hold its annual all-you-can-eat breakfast Sunday, April 26 at Dallas High School. All proceeds benefit The Arc. Cost is \$5 per adult and \$2.50 for children, ages 3-12, under 3 free. Tickets are available by calling Sgt. Daniel Hunsinger at 288-4576 or by contacting any B.M.P.A. member. Tickets will also be available at the door.

For more information on these events or to find out about other events going on throughout the month, call 829-7953.

Orienteering Club to meet March 21

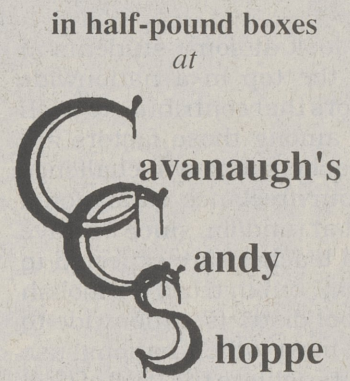
The Pocono Orienteering Club (POC) will hold its first event of the 1998 season on March 21 at Frances Slocum State Park.

Participants can register and start any time between 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. The entry fee is \$5 per map and small groups such as families can use one map. Compasses can be rented for 50 cents. Instruction is available at all times. Four different courses will be available for varying levels. Events are held regardless of weather, so proper clothing and footwear are recommended.

In orienteering, participants use a detailed five-color map and a compass to locate control locations in the park. Recreational and competitive categories are available. Beginner courses remain on well-marked hiking trails.

For more information, contact Sid or Cydney Halso at 696-4413.

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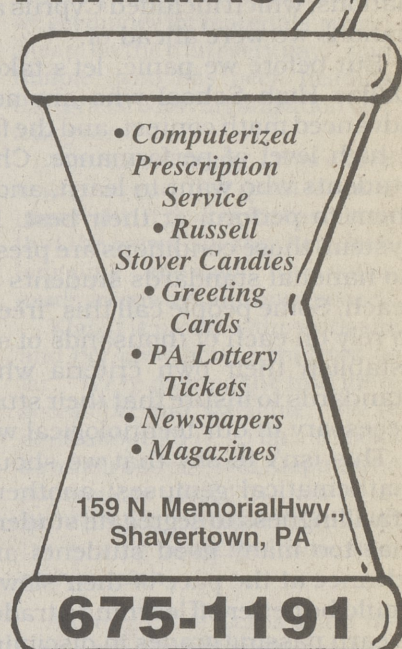


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Veterans of the division have reunions each year. In 1998 reunion will be in Pittsburgh in September.

Former members can obtain more information by calling (215) 699-9498 or writing William H. Young, Jr., 307 N. Main St., North Wales, PA 19454-2505.

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Admission is free, but seats are limited.
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