

The Emory Valley Center – a jewel in our crown: Supporting People – Supporting Dreams! – Part 2

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on March 16, 2010)

We continue the history of the Emory Valley Center as written by Dottie Thompson.

But first let me correct a name wrongly stated last week. Frances (Holley) Hickey called to tell me her mother, Mrs. J. M. (Edwina, but known as "Peg") Holley, was incorrectly identified as "Mrs. J. B. Holly."

Frances was most appreciative of the attempt to make known the history of how the Emory Valley Center began and that her mom was a part of that tremendous endeavor. As I said last week, I am pleased to be able to bring this history to you.

Now let's continue with Dottie's history:

"In the early 1960s Dr. Brody conceived and carried out a plan to build a comprehensive rehabilitation center, joining the Emory Valley School and the Cerebral Palsy Center under one roof. With an addition donation of seven acres from the Atomic Energy Commission (now the Department of Energy) and with funding primarily from the Hill-Burton Act and matching Anderson County monies, the Daniel Arthur Rehabilitation Center (DARC) was built on the west side of the property and adjoined the Emory Valley School.

"The Daniel Arthur Special School within the rehabilitation center prospered and soon most of the surrounding counties began to use the facility for the education, training and habilitation of their students with mental and physical disabilities. Leading citizens such as Horace Wells and A. D. Crenshaw of Clinton, and Oak Ridgers St. George Tucker Arnold, Gene Joyce and Dr. Paul Spray helped lead the efforts toward building the Rehabilitation Center.

"The Oak Ridge Council for Retarded Children became the Anderson Association for Retarded Children in 1964 and later changed its name to the present ARC/AC [or Arc of Anderson County].

"By 1966 many of these students had become adults and additional services to emphasize developmental and vocational training were added and a sheltered workshop was begun in the early steel structure. A new sheltered workshop was completed in 1971 on land donated by the City of Oak Ridge across the street from the DARC building.

"Community volunteers who worked tirelessly on this new facility were Martha Hobson, Fred Stout, Luther Agee, Red Williams, Dick Jernigan, Judge Buddy Scott, Bill Thompson, Russell Leed, Doug Fain, and Y-12 Plant Manager Jack Case. A grant from the Department of Mental Health and the federal government, as well as contributions from the community, provided needed funds.

"In 1973 funds from the federal title XX program were accessed to provide prevocational and developmental programming in an Adult Activity Center for those adults who lacked the skills for full time sheltered employment. For a while this program was housed in Highland View School after its closing and was later moved to the DARC building and today occupies 12,000 square feet in the building.

"Daniel Arthur Special School, which included the Emory Valley School, all changed in the early 1980s when new federal and state laws mandated each school district to place their disabled students, ages 4-22, in their local schools in less restrictive environments, and students were returned to their home school districts which were challenged to provide appropriate educational programs.

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“As Daniel Arthur’s school population decreased, more and more of these children were becoming adults and after exiting school, entered the sheltered workshop and the adult activity center. Because the name Emory Valley continued to be used by the school, to avoid duplication and minimize confusion, the adult services became known as Community Services for Exceptional Citizens (CSEC) (now Emory Valley Center). Administrative offices across the street were constructed to serve adults in a variety of programs and additional space was leased from the county in the DARC building.

“As the need to expand services for adults became apparent, Emory Valley Center added a residential component and opened its first group home in November 1973. Within two years two more group homes were opened. Emory Valley Center now owns or leases 38 buildings and provides housing in a community setting for 80 residents in 31 sites.

“The Emory Valley Center and its current and original sponsor, the ARC of Anderson County, continue to provide an array of supports and services to adults, children and seniors with disabilities. They have a passion for what they do and want to ensure continued growth.

“The parents and the community came together in 1955 to begin the first school in this area for moderately and severely retarded children. From those humble beginnings and tireless efforts of parents and community volunteers, the Emory Valley Center now provides programs and services for 140 adults with mental and physical disabilities, autism and emotional disabilities.

“Those programs include the sheltered workshop which assists participants in preparing workplace skills, supported living, residential habilitation, facility based and community based day services, supported employment which provides jobs and job coaching for people with disabilities in the community, case management, skilled nursing services to individuals requiring daily nursing interventions and on an as-needed basis for injuries, early intervention services for children from birth to age 4, and family support services which provides assistance to families in a 10 county region in their role as caregivers. Their mission of creating quality lives every day for people in a challenging world continues.

“With a \$160,000 contribution from the Anderson County Commission, Emory Valley Center has purchased the property adjacent to the administrative offices at 715 Emory Valley Road. Plans currently call for the Anderson County Commission in five years to give the City of Oak Ridge the Daniel Arthur Building for \$1 and the City plans to demolish it. As many of the Emory Valley Center programs are centered in this building, raising funds in the next few years for a new building is paramount.

“Special therapies and special education has been available in Oak Ridge and Anderson County for five decades in what has evolved now into the Emory Valley Center. Oak Ridge should be justifiably proud of this heritage and of the pioneer role it has played in providing programs for the mentally and physically disabled children and adults of Oak Ridge and the areas surrounding it.

“Life for most people with mental disabilities has improved in the last 20 to 30 years and a heightened public awareness and understanding of their needs and capabilities has produced many of the changes. The staff at Emory Valley Center believes that each individual deserves an opportunity to develop his/her maximum potential and make available an environment conducive to the growth and development of each person served.

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"Information [for this history was] provided by Marge Conlin and Lynne Fortenbery, members of the Oak Ridge Council for Mentally Retarded Children, Ann McRae former Emory Valley Center and DARC teacher and later supervisor of special education for Anderson County Schools, John Rice Irwin, former Anderson County Schools Superintendent, Don Russell, former physical therapist at DARC, [and] Debbie Warrington, former DARC principal.

"Emory Valley Center is licensed by the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities (which has recently become the Department of Intellectual Disabilities) and the Department of Health. The Center is currently funded through the Department of Finance and Administration's Division of Intellectual Disabilities (formerly Mental Retardation).

Now you have a better understanding of this "jewel in our crown" that is the concern and advocacy for those of our community who are facing challenges most of us cannot appreciate. I am so proud of the dedicated individuals who have over the years assured that these special individuals in our midst have all the opportunities possible for the highest possible quality of life they can attain.

Thank you, Gene Caldwell and Dottie Thompson, for the opportunity to publish this unique history. When asked to help fund the new building for Emory Valley Center, readers, please do so.



Left to right, Ada Hopkins, daughter Susan, Clyde Hopkins, Mrs. Betty Seivers, the Reverend Wayne Cummings and Y-12 Plant Manager, Jack Case