

# **The Emory Valley Center – a jewel in our crown: Supporting People – Supporting Dreams!**

**(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on March 9, 2010)**

Over the years, writing this Historically Speaking column has opened doors for me and brought insights into many aspects of Oak Ridge history that I never could have learned otherwise. This column is one I am most proud to bring to you.

The history of the Emory Valley Center was provided by Gene Caldwell and Dottie Thompson. My awareness of their most recent fund raising efforts resulted from a presentation they made to the Oak Ridge Breakfast Rotary Club. After an excellent presentation, we agreed to collaborate to bring readers of Historically Speaking an updated version of the history of the Emory Valley Center.

As you may know, the Emory Valley Center provides a wide variety of supports and services including: Supported Living, Residential Habilitation, Semi-Independent Living, Facility Based and Community Based Day Services, Supported Employment, Case Management, Personal Assistance, Nursing Services, Early Intervention Services, Family Support Services and Transportation.

Emory Valley Center is funded through the Department of Finance and Administration's Division of Intellectual Disabilities Services, the Department of Human Services' Division of Rehabilitative Services, the Department of Housing and Human Development, and United Way. This description comes from their web site, [www.emoryvalleycenter.com](http://www.emoryvalleycenter.com). Their slogan, "Supporting People – Supporting Dreams" is most appropriate for the work they do.

My personal awareness of the Emory Valley Center comes from my involvement as a member of the United Way of Anderson County Board of Directors and our support given the wonderful work they have consistently done over the years. The Emory Valley Center is one of our most

The challenges faced by the individuals served by the Emory Valley Center make me aware of just how blessed I am and the United Way continues, in my opinion, to be the best way to help others in our community who need special services. I am proud to be a part of that service provided our communities!

The following history of the Emory Valley Center is provided by Dottie and included here for you:

"In the early 1950s a group of Oak Ridge parents of mentally retarded children, concerned by the lack of educational and recreational programs for their children, began to meet at the old Highland View School. With the goal of creating opportunities for education and socialization, this group of motivated parents chartered the Oak Ridge Council for Retarded Children in 1955.

"The early organization minutes mention Oak Ridgers Ray and Iva Thatcher, Maurice and Lynne Fortenbery, Mr. and Mrs. E.N. Kleinsteuber, Betty and Todd Kleinsteuber, Dr. Leon Lebovitz, Andy and Elsie Fowler, Margie and John Conlin, Bob and Judy Carter, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Beach, Joe and Betty Sawicki, Mary Shane, and Mrs. J. B. Holly. By the end of their first year the membership had grown to 59.

"The Atomic Energy Commission donated a small galvanized steel building, a surplus barracks on Emory Valley Road on the site of the present Daniel Arthur Rehabilitation building, to serve as the small school for their children. [Don't you know they were excited that their efforts had actually produced facilities for a school...I can't imagine how they must have felt! – Ray]

"After holding fundraisers such as selling screwdrivers and firewood, holding raffles, and obtaining donations from the community and groups such as the Kiwanis, Jaycees, Scottish Rite Club, U.F.W, The

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Oak Ridger, Bruners, Lovemans and the American Legion, and after locating salvage furniture, the Oak Ridge School for Retarded Children opened its doors September 19, 1955.

"This first school opened with 16 children, two staff members – Mrs. Margaret Spoon who served as principal and teacher, and a cook-housekeeper. The second year the number of children increased to 22 and a teacher was added.

"The Oak Ridge Unitarian Church and Robertsville Baptist Church donated labor and the Oak Ridge Garden Club landscaped the new school grounds. All that remains of this first building is the concrete slab on which it sat where today active preschoolers can be seen playing on their riding toys.

"The Oak Ridge Council for Retarded Children added a nursery school class in the fall of 1956 in Dearborn Hall, a dormitory building near the present Girls Club building, and swimming classes taught by Bets Higgins and Blanche Dresner were added in the summer of 1957.

"A two week day camp was begun in 1959 at the Girl Scout Camp Friendship and a summer playground was started in 1963 under Carol Bailey, an Oak Ridge High School teacher. This playground still operates today under the auspices of the ARC (Association of Retarded Citizens) and is directed by former Woodland teacher Ronnie Powell.

"By 1957 the numbers of mentally disabled children had grown and efforts began toward the construction of a larger school on the same property. The Atomic Energy Commission donated three acres for a new Emory Valley School building on the same site.

"In the fall of 1958 a new red brick building, built with volunteer labor from trades and labor unions and with contributions from many civic organizations including the Jaycees, the Civitans, the Elks Club, and the Norris Religious Fellowship, the new and larger Emory Valley School opened its doors. This larger building was built in an 'L,' contained six classrooms and still stands at the east end of the property.

"Fundraisers included paper and magazine collection, a car raffle and a charity ball sponsored by the Jaycees, and contributions from many community groups. [Fundraising has been a constant need over the years and remains an essential even today with the most recent effort to provide a new building – Ray]

"About the same time that the group of Oak Ridge Parents began to meet in the early '50s, a mother in neighboring Clinton, Mrs. Edna Gossage, whose son Daniel Arthur had been diagnosed with cerebral palsy, began to locate other children with similar disabilities. They formed the Anderson County Parents Council.

"As their group enlarged, they moved to Oak Ridge into the former Tennyson Nursery School building on the corner of Tennyson Road and Oak Ridge Turnpike across the street from where the Phillips 66 station now stands. Dr. Steve Brody, a school psychologist with the Anderson County Schools, became their director, and this building was called the Cerebral Palsy Center.

I hope you appreciate the dedicated efforts of these parents who tackled the tough issues facing them and admirably achieved improved conditions for their special children. I am convinced we who have never

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faced such challenges cannot understand nor appreciate the extreme emotional, spiritual and physical strength required to deal with the circumstances created by retardation.

Next we will continue this history and bring the Emory Valley Center history up to the present.



From left to right, Marguerite Ebert Blake, Sam Burris, Vice Chairman of the Board and longtime advocate for the mentally retarded Doug Fain, Larry Lyles and Ms. Blake's son, Edward Ebert Blake



Clients working with small hand assembly job, the same type work that continues even today - with back to camera, Mike Kleinstein, Janis Kopp, Debbie Johnston, Suzie Shacter, Workshop supervision Randy Day, Harold Buchanan and Larry Lyles