

Rochester Association for Blind

New Location Treating Old Handicap



Doug Neiss uses computer with Braille terminal.

Text and Photos By Laurence E. Keefer

Ask almost anybody which sense they would least want to be deprived, and most will say, "I'd hate to be blind."

Blindness has long been recognized as one of the worst of man's afflictions because it makes even the simplest tasks such as cooking an egg a demanding and perilous challenge.

Treatment of the blind in the past has often provided for constant care and training in some particular craft like piano tuning or weaving. The goal now, says Dan Meyers of the Rochester Association for the Blind, is to assure that "to the well-adjusted person, blindness can be no more than an inconvenience and not a handicap."

The Clinton Avenue facility "is not an institutional setting," said Meyers, who is head of recreational therapy. "Most of our services are conducted in the home, and this is really a headquarters here," he explained, pointing around him to the association's newly acquired and renovated building at 422 Clinton Ave. S. in Rochester.

But Dan Meyers is too modest — the building is much more than just a headquarters. Among many other things, it contains a clinic to aid those with low vision, a workout room for physical fitness, a cafeteria run by the blind, industrial workshops and workshop training areas, offices, a music room and even a printing shop.

The association even has its own computer set up to be operated by a blind person. The computer's readout goes to a terminal contained in an attache case, which punches out a tape in Braille. Programmer Doug Neiss,

blind five years, has worked with the computer since September, 1970. The computer department, he explained, will have within the year a "People Program" to follow the association's clients and their success in various programs.

Asked if he had enough to do, Neiss laughed, "I'm too busy. I only get paid a salary."

Upstairs on the second floor, Wayne Rowe is running business. His nominal title is Vocational Training Manager, but actually he's involved in "very competitive" bidding for job contracts from local industry.

The workshop has two regular contracts, one with Rochester Telephone for cleaning old phones, and another with Kodak for bending plastic tubes to specification: Up to six girls can be employed doing industrial sewing, and the shop takes in various assembly jobs to train workers in a variety of skills.

"Because we get federal grants," explained Rowe, "we're forbidden by law to use this money to compete against other businesses. We have to base our bids on what the job will cost us."

"I'm happy the more new faces I have in here every year," said Rowe, who emphasized that the workshop is not to provide permanent employment for the visually handicapped.

The association also runs a Personal Adjustment Training (PAT) program which emphasizes job skills such as punctuality and getting along with a supervisor. Clients employed there also perform contract jobs such as stripping outdated film so that silver and parts can be reclaimed.

Mrs. Marie James, head of the PAT program, said that her people work only four hours a day, and are pro-



Partially sighted workers bend plastic industrial tubing in workshop program