



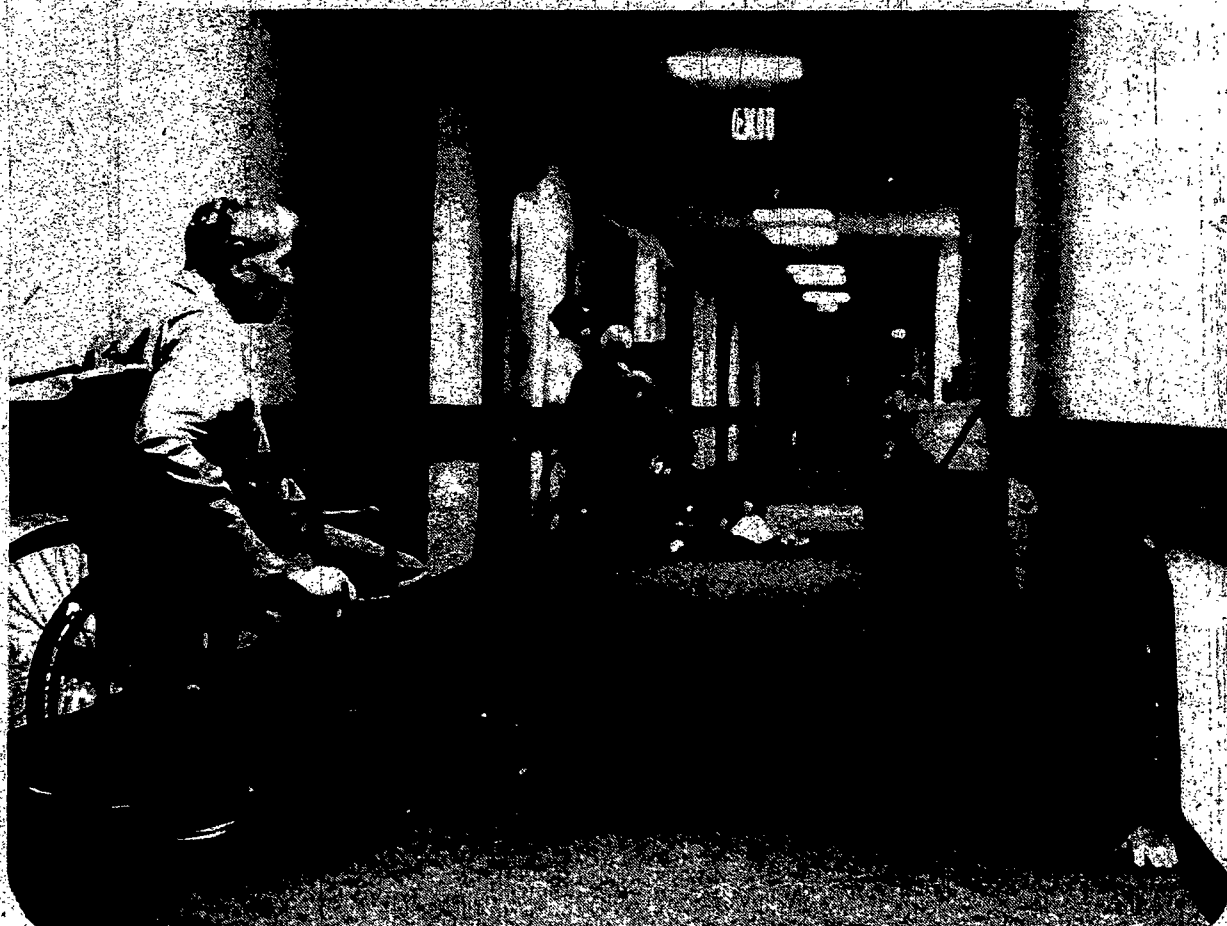
Friends bridge the generation gap



Mrs. Sarah Knapp gets a friendly assist



Miss Clemma Comerale recounts a tale.



Bert Schwartz leans from his wheelchair to explain a point to his visitor.

# Meeting Some Fine Friends

By MARY ANN GINNERTY

"Seek a friend and you shall find him" might well be the motto for a group of Owasco youths who visit the patients at Mercy Health and Rehabilitation Center every Sunday evening come gas shortage, inclement weather or more promising social engagements.

The youths, ranging from seventh graders through high school juniors, don't do anything in particular, but offer themselves and their caring.

The idea for the Owasco youth group evolved from St. Ann's confirmation class which saw a need for a social outlet for youths in the rural Owasco community. The group then adopted patient-visiting at Mercy Rehab Center. St. Ann's youth were then joined by the Owasco Reform Church.

Social meetings are held weekly, but it is the hospital visiting which attracts a core group of 25 each Sunday.

Accompanied by their advisor, John Ridgeway of St. Ann's, the group hits the lobby of the Rehab Center en masse, disperses to several floors, to re-emerge an hour later.

Meanwhile, youths may be found perched on a bedside with a favorite confidante or perhaps in groups of three or four sharing teen-age banter in exchange for reminiscences about the way it was back on the farm or how the patient knew the visitor's mother as a tot next door.

Other kids go from room to room striking up conversations with patients sitting alone. The spontaneity of youth overcomes the initial conversational gap.

Ridgeway says patient response has ranged from those who initially didn't care if the youths visited or not; those unable to remember one week to the next, to those patients who have built up a relationship with individuals over the months.

The kids bring sunshine and the vitality of youth, mixed with a dash of caring, willingness to listen and learn from a generation who has lived a lifetime of rich experience.

Who benefits the most? It really doesn't matter. What matters is the coming together of the generations, the spirited remembrances, a little advice spiced with humor, and the friendships.

John Ridgeway on his c photograph