

70 Years for Disabled

By Michael Groden

In proclaiming 1981 the International Year of the Disabled Person, the United Nations hopes to bring the world's attention to problems which the disabled face.

Problems of not being able to enter buildings, overcoming the stigma "normal" people have regarding the handicapped, and the simple desire of the disabled to lead a dignified, productive life are all worthy of our attention.

One concern, perhaps not as lofty as the aforementioned, but equally important, is how can handicapped children have fun.

The Boy Scouts of America is one organization that has dedicated itself to that goal in earnest, and it has been doing so for more than 70 years.

Since 1910 the Scouts have realized that scouting is "good for boys," handicapped or not, and it has developed programs that fit the special needs disabled scouts may have.

There are official scouting handbooks for the deaf, mentally impaired and retarded, visually impaired, and physically handicapped that are updated regularly.

In the Rochester area the Oretiana Council has established a full-time staff worker for handicapped scouts. Tom Wright's major concern is "to mainstream handicapped scouts into regular units." If that isn't possible, however, separate units, strictly for disabled scouts, are begun.

Currently, Wright is working with the Rochester School District and "all agencies that deal with handicapped people" in the area to "establish where the need for special scout units is and then try to fill that need."

Handicapped Cub Packs, Scout Troops and Explorer Posts are not new to the Rochester area. The Rochester School for the Deaf, for example, has had an active scout unit for 50 years, Wright said.

However, since Wright took over in June of 1980, there has been a new emphasis placed on increasing the handicapped program in Rochester. He estimates that there are currently 28 Cub, Boy Scout, and Explorer units that the Oretiana Council works with.

One such unit is Troop 333, based in Webster. Troop 333, which meets at Holy Trinity School, is for "boys

with learning disabilities," according to Louis Bergen, troop leader.

It is a small group, presently six young men, but it works out quite well that way, Bergen explained that with the small number more time can be spent with each scout.

The scouting program is basically the same as regular units. Merit badges and skill awards are earned, first aid and proper camping procedures are taught and the famous campouts take place.

Bergen said that the merit badge regulations were rewritten for the special units "to make up for any limitations" there might be.

"We don't push them to be super achievers," he said. "We just let them do what ever they're able to do."

The main objective is to let the kids have fun, and if last week's meeting is any indication, that is achieved.

Troop 333 has set up a regular schedule of events, Bergen reported, and if that schedule is not adhered to, "the boys let us know about it."

Some activities include an annual visit to the local volunteer fire department. "All of the volunteer firemen show up for that one," he said. The scouts are instructed on how to use the fire equipment and take part in putting out "small controlled fires" with the help of the volunteers.

Troop 333 also travels to Camp Massawepie each year. This year a special seventh week has been added to the Adirondack Mountain camp's schedule and set aside especially for handicapped scouts.

The main reason for this, Bergen explained, is to make available as many volunteer staff for the scouts as possible. Some of the scouts need added attention and the seventh week is geared to making the needed staff available.

Last week's meeting involved three members of the troop, George Kerson, Bobby Gallo and Dan Bergen, the troop leader's son.



Bobby Gallo (left) loosens up on the basketball court just before the Scout meeting began as George Kerson looks on.

They worked on proper techniques for treating shock victims and those who have suffered cuts and burns.

When a scout reaches age 16 the usual procedure is to go on to the explorer post. Bergen explained that is usually the case but if a scout wants to stay with the troop, he may. Troop 333 members currently range from 13 to 22 years of age.

Webster does have an Explorer unit for the handicapped. It is a larger group and "is co-ed," Bergen said. Once again, the regular scouting rules are "changed" somewhat to fit the need. Most of the members of Troop 333 decide to join the Explorer Post, Bergen said. "Mostly because there are girls," he quipped. That sounded like a perfectly normal reaction for a sixteen-year-old.

Child's Potential Must Be Optimized

By Martin Toombs
Southern Tier Editor

Ithaca — Sara Pines, a psychotherapist who works with handicapped children and their parents, offers such parents hope and a challenge.

"Disabilities do not disappear, nor can they be wished away," she has written in a handout, "for optimal functioning, education, training and rehabilitation are essential."

Parents must work to optimize the potential of their handicapped child, she tells them, a process which begins with their acceptance of their child's disability.

When Ms. Pines speaks of the problems of a handicapped child, she does so not only as a professional therapist, but also as the parent of a child she was once told to institutionalize.

Even while she now recommends that parents accept the handicap of their child, a few years ago, she recounted how she and her husband spent a couple years denying their son's problems.

Danny, now 11 years old, didn't demonstrate any problems at birth, and when he was slow in developing



Danny Pines is poised to play a flipper on his pinball machine, while a friend, David Liddington, watches. The pinball machine is fun for Danny and his friends, but more importantly, it has helped him develop hand-eye coordination, a key to success in many other tasks.

skills, his pediatrician said he would catch up. When he was three, Ms. Pines said, the staff of a pre-school program forced them to take him to a neurologist. She identified three problems: cerebral palsy, a speech defect, and a problem which causes curvature of the spine.

She recommended institutionalization.

Ms. Pines said she and her husband were shocked by the recommendation, and spent two years going through a "period of mourning." Meanwhile Danny started work with an occupational therapist at the Special Children's Center.

Danny attended a private kindergarten for two years, and a regular one for two more. At age seven, Ms. Pines said, he had spent four years in kindergarten and hadn't really progressed.

It was then that she decided

to investigate the program offered by the local BOCES, and was "utterly shocked" at the high quality of the facility and the program. Danny went here for three years, benefiting from several therapies. The regular school had said he would never write, he now does. For two years he participated in a karate class, and has earned a blue belt. The BOCES sessions also helped him to learn to take instruction, coordinate movements, and to think clearly.

From age seven to ten, Ms.

Pines did therapy with Danny to help him express his feelings about his problems.

Regretting the time lost for Danny, Ms. Pines emphasizes the need for handicaps to be identified quickly, and be dealt with in an appropriate, coordinated way.

This year Danny is back in regular school. His three years at BOCES were "an excellent experience," she said, but noted the disadvantage in the segregation in such a program. "I see mainstreaming as a very, very important development," she said.

While such specialized treatment can be expensive, Ms. Pines said that she feels it is important to "spend whatever is necessary" to optimize a child's potential. "Dependence is one of the most crippling diseases you can ever infect a child with," she said. It is important to tell the child, "you can do it, you're valuable, you're needed."

That means a handicapped child must learn responsibility, and that requires risk-taking. Ms. Pines told of the first time they let Danny ride the Ithaca city buses by himself. He got lost, she said, but hasn't since.

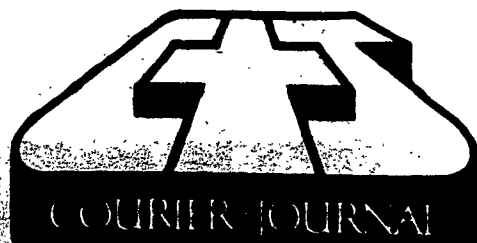
Danny's program doesn't end when he finishes school each day. The Pines' basement is filled with games,

to improve his coordination, especially hand-eye coordination, a key factor in many other skills, including reading. A boxer's "speed bag," a ping-pong table and a pinball machine all serve that aim. Danny also has private reading instruction and fencing lessons.

While his speech defect is detectable, he is easily understood and signs of his other problems are not immediately apparent. Meeting him now, eight years after a recommendation he be institutionalized was made, an observer is reminded of another point of advice Ms. Pines gives to parents of handicapped children.

They must be persistent in their dealing with educational and other professionals, acting as an advocate for their child, she says. They must make sure that the best possible program for their child is being made available, and they must be willing to add to those offerings of the schools.

And, she said, parents should look on medical, treatment and educational professionals as consultants, and not cede their power as parents to them. It is, in the end, the parents themselves who must decide the best course for their child, and then bear the burden necessary for its successful completion.



COURIER-JOURNAL Support Programs for the Disabled