

Unprejudiced Arthritis Victimizes all Ages

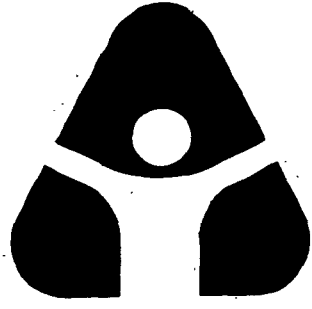
By Joan M. Smith

Stereotype means a fixed or conventional notion or conception. It is a term that will be heard quite often during this International Year of the Disabled. It is a word that may describe the non-disabled world's view of the handicapped.

For John Geiger, who has rheumatoid arthritis, it is the stereotyping of arthritis victims. Mention arthritis, he said, and people immediately think of the elderly. Yet the disease, according to information published by the Arthritis Foundation, occurs at all ages, from infancy on.

John has suffered from the disease since he was eight years old. He was a student at Our Lady of Perpetual Help when he developed a sore ankle. At first it was thought to be a sprain but it continued to deteriorate. He went into the hospital and rheumatoid arthritis was diagnosed. Since then his life has been one of wheelchairs, pain, and surgery. But it has also been one of accomplishments.

He describes himself as having incredible determination. When he graduated from Bishop Kearney High School in 1978, he was



determined to walk across the stage to receive his diploma — and he did. "I had been in a wheelchair so long that it ate at me," he said.

He is now a junior at St. John Fisher College majoring in accounting. He is a member of the National Organization of Accounting, is active in the local Genesee Chapter of the Arthritis Association, and serves on financial and programming committees for various handicapped service organizations. Quite an agenda of activity when added to his day-to-day battle with arthritis.

Presently, his knee is giving him problems and he is scheduled for surgery in May. His doctors and parents want him to use the wheelchair but he resists. "They say it's my

pride getting in the way," he said.

Whether pride or stubbornness, John tackles his volunteer involvement as he tackles the arthritis — with determination. He's bullish on two major points. One is making the handicapped aware of what is available to them. "There are virtually hundreds of programs and people don't know about them," he said. He mentioned the new Arthritis Foundation Care Team service, and the clinic for senior citizens.

The other is the coping; the ability to survive in a non-disabled world.

"There's a definite lack of all facilities," he said and described the obstacles that stymie the handicapped. He mentioned elevator buttons as a problem for those in wheelchairs, and emphasized that drinking fountains and telephones had to be made more accessible. He is also upset over the fact that the Regional Transit Corporation is considering the removal of wheelchair lifts from a new fleet of buses.

"Many handicapped could be independent if facilities were better," he declared.

In regard to stereotyping, John said that not only do people think only the elderly have arthritis, but they also lump victims in one category — osteo-arthritis which is only the more common type. However, there are various kinds and rheumatoid, which is inflammatory, spreading from joint to joint and affecting the whole body, is one of them.

The disease didn't cause sudden isolation for John. For the first four or five years it wasn't too bad. He continued doing almost everything. But every so often he would realize there were things he could no longer do.

"It's not the pain so much as not being able to do things that I could do three months ago," he explained. This irritates John but doesn't depress him.

"Before I was 10 I used to question, but not anymore. You have to take what you have. I feel lucky. I'm getting an education with good job potential."

Corporate View Of Disabilities

Employment regulations dealing with handicapped persons differ from affirmative action rulings for minorities and women, according to an Eastman Kodak spokesman.

Kenneth Howard, director of Urban Affairs and Equal Employment Opportunity, Personnel Relations Department, said that federal regulations state that "reasonable accommodations" be made for handicapped persons at work.

Howard explained that Kodak's approach in hiring people is "to look at people in terms of ability," rather than at their limitations.

When a disabled person comes to work for Kodak, arrangements are made to accommodate whatever needs may arise, he said. These needs may range from building ramps or elevators, to adding special equipment such as a "TTY machine" which allows deaf people to communicate on a telephone.

Howard added that all new buildings and all

renovation projects at Kodak now include planning for handicapped persons. Renovation plans include wider hallways to allow for wheelchairs, proper bathroom facilities, lower drinking fountains and phone booths, and "even a braille typewriter, if needed," Howard said.

When asked how many handicapped employees Kodak has, he said that it was impossible to tell. "It all goes back to our philosophy on hiring. We do not hire a person because he or she has a physical problem. We hire them on a basis of what they are capable of doing. Consequently, no statistics are kept.

"We do not want to place a label on a person; he or she is just an employee," he said.

Kodak also takes part in co-op agreements with handicapped agencies like the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID) and the Rochester Rehabilitation Center. The company also "contracts out" work with these and other agencies.

Howard added that a



program "still in the planning stage" is being put together which would combine local industry and social agencies working with

disabled people into "a kind of network" that would set up a job recruitment program for handicapped persons.

Al Sigi Center Gets Kodak Contribution

Eastman Kodak has contributed \$240,000 to the Al Sigi Center Capital Fund Campaign.

Justin L. Vigdor, honorary chairman of the center's capital steering committee, said, "This generous gift from Kodak has contributed significantly to our \$2,361,500 goal and we greatly appreciate the support."

Vigdor reported that \$545,451 has been raised since the campaign was launched in January.

David Whitaker, committee chairman, said that four businessmen have agreed to serve on an advisory committee for the drive — George Beinetti, retired president of the Rochester Telephone Corp.; Thomas Riley, new president of Blue Shield; William G. vonBerg,

chairman and chief executive officer of Sybron, and Frank Hutchings, president of Hutchins Y&R.

Expansion of the present Al Sigi Center at 1000 Elmwood Ave. will provide more space for two agencies — Mary Cariola Children's Center (MCCC) and Medical Motor Service.

MCCC serves 350 severely mentally and physically

disabled children for whom there are no other programs available in Monroe County. Because of lack of space at the center, 100 of the children are in programs temporarily at the Baird Road School in Penfield.

Medical Motor Service has expanded to include serving 13 senior center nutrition centers and needs more space to coordinate the program and house the vehicles at the center.

Arthritis Help

In emphasizing the need to make the handicapped aware of the services available to them, John explained there are hundreds of pamphlets put out by organizations. "A phone call gets you all kinds of information," he said.

Those suffering with arthritis can call 271-3540, ask for the Arthritis Foundation, and receive information regarding its new Arthritis Care Team service. The team is an in-home consultation program made up of volunteer consultants who have completed formal training through the foundation.

Service objectives include providing emotional support to the patient, providing information regarding individual's particular form of arthritis, and offering information on various helpful devices when appropriate.

Consultations take place in the home of the patient. The service is non-medical, confidential, and free of charge. Anyone wishing to be a volunteer with the Care Team should contact the Patient Services coordinator at 271-3540.

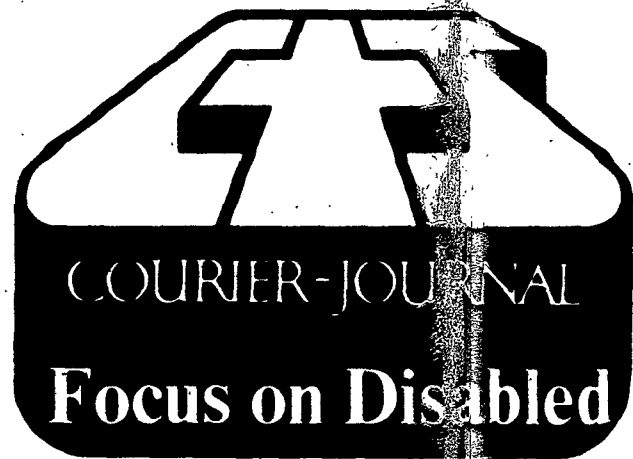
Also by calling 271-3540, information can be obtained about the Foundation's Water Exercise Therapy Program. Classes are held on well-heated pools at the Rochester Psychiatric Center, Monroe Developmental Center, and Jewish Community Center.

Participants must call the Chapter Office before attending classes, and a physician's referral is required for participation in the therapy.

Persons who are severely handicapped and cannot use public transportation and do not drive may request a ride in the Red Cross vehicles.

Other services offered by the Arthritis Foundation include: information and referral, a club for arthritis members, patient publications, counseling, patient support groups, and patient public meetings.

The Arthritis Foundation, Genesee Chapter, is at 973 East Ave.



Red Cross Offers Special Swim Course

The American Red Cross will offer a special swimming course for instructors who work with handicapped persons on April 3-5 at five different localities.

The courses, called Adapted Aquatics, will focus on swimming instruction for people "disabled by asthma, behavioral disorders, cardiac disabilities, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, hearing impairment, mental retardation, multiple sclerosis, neuromuscular disorders, orthopedic impairments, spina bifida, and visual disabilities," according to a Red Cross release.

Participants in the course must hold a current Red Cross Water Safety Instructor or Red Cross Basic Swimming Instructor certification or YMCA certification in area 25/55 or above.

The course will take place at Rochester Institute of Technology, Al Sigi Center, BOCES I (airport), and the Red Cross, Prince St.

To register, qualified instructors may call Red Cross Safety Services, (716) 275-9800.

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