

St. Joseph's Villa celebrates 50th anniversary

Agency's goal to assist youths has not changed

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

GREECE — When Ed arrived at St. Joseph's Villa five years ago, he needed to overcome two immense challenges: he had led a troubled family life up to that point, and he was also hindered by a learning disability.

Yet, through the help of the Villa's programs and staff, he moved into a group home when he was 16. After eventually progressing into a public school setting, he graduated from Greece Athena High School last June.

Ed is grateful for both the educational and emotional support he received from the staff at St. Joseph's Villa.

"They gave me special help. They helped me grow and bring out my skills," he said. "Then, when I started at Athena, it was scary because I didn't know how I'd fit in. But they said, 'Ed, you're mature enough — and we're there if you need us.'"

The 19-year-old Ed currently holds a full-time job at Strong Memorial Hospital. He plans on attending Monroe Community College, beginning in January, 1993.



Ed (right) gives his counselor, Bill Pearson, a 'thumbs up' in front of the St. James Cottage at St. Joseph's Villa in Greece, where Ed spent 18 months. Ed, who now works full-time at Strong Memorial Hospital, plans on attending Monroe Community College in January. The Villa is currently celebrating its 50th anniversary of providing support services for youths and their families.

Babette G. Augustin/Photo editor



File photo
Counselor Dwane Williams takes a playful jab from Tyrone in stride Summer Olympics in 1985.

"Ed is definitely not the same person he was when he first came here," remarked his counselor, Bill Pearson.

The same can be said for countless other boys and girls who have walked through the doors at St. Joseph's Villa, 3300 Dewey Ave., over the last half century.

Marking its 50th anniversary this year, the agency has experienced tremendous growth in its programs and facilities — particularly in the last decade. The Villa's original purpose, however, remains the same: to provide support services for youths and their families.

Construction of St. Joseph's Villa began on an 80-acre piece of farm land in the 1930s. In the summer of 1942, under the direction of the Rochester diocese and a staff of 16 Sisters of St. Joseph, approximately 100 youths became the Villa's original residents.

"We were all orphans or children from families that had split up," said Joseph Miller, who, along with his brother, Frank, was a member of that

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Ed
St. Joseph's Villa client

inaugural group.

The youths were housed in five cottages, a departure from that era's traditional institutional setting. In addition, classes were conducted in a couple of old farm buildings.

In the 1950s, the Villa gradually shifted its focus toward specializing in mental health services. Another change occurred in 1976 when the diocese ceased its affiliation with the Villa and an independent board of directors assumed the agency's leadership.

Many new buildings have been constructed on the Villa's grounds over the last 10 years. In 1983 the Education Complex was built, providing Villa residents with a gymnasium and recreation center as well as additional classroom space. The Life Program Building was opened to service chemically dependent children in 1987. And a new school building — the Campus School — was constructed in 1990, when a sixth cottage was also opened.

A dedication ceremony took place

Continued on next page

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